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STATO MAGGIORE DELL'ESERCITO  
UFFICIO STORICO

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LE OPERAZIONI  
DELLE UNITÀ ITALIANE  
AL FRONTE RUSSO  
(1941-1943)

ROMA 1977

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
GENERAL STAFF OF THE ARMY  
HISTORICAL OFFICE

OPERATIONS  
OF THE  
ITALIAN UNITS  
ON THE  
RUSSIAN FRONT  
(1941-1943)

ROME 1977

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REGIONAL TYPOGRAPHY - ROME – 1977

This volume has been made, as part of the institutional activity of the Historical Office of the Army General Staff, by a working group composed of Colonel (aus.) Constantine De Franceschi, by Lt. Col. t.SG (res.) Giorgio de Vecchi and Lt. Col. (spe) Fabio Mantouani, with the collaboration of Sgt. Maj. Riccardo Graziosi and by Sgt. Fernando Battista.



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## WARNINGS

1. For Russian words, transliteration from Cyrillic to Latin is obtained by taking into account the phonetic characteristics of the Italian language and, in part, the so-called 'scientific transcription', since this presupposes, for a correct pronunciation, Knowledge of both original sounds and some particular signs that represent them.

The scientific transcription was then completely abandoned for those known names according to certain handwriting now well-known and well-known by all.

In the documents attached to the text, it was preferred to leave the original handwriting without any variation.

2. To avoid any discrepancy between text and documents, often used the abbreviations and the conventional signs in force at the time of the events, as shown on the following pages.

























LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS  
AND OF THE CONVENTIONAL SIGNS































CONVENTIONAL SIGNS AND ABBREVIATIONS  
IN USE IN 1940 - 45

SEGNi CONVENZIONALI E ABBREVIAZIONI  
IN USO NEL 1940 - 45

 Comando armata (8 <sup>a</sup> )	A.	 Battaglione di fanteria	btg.
 Intendenza dell'8 <sup>a</sup> armata	I.A.	 Battaglione di fanteria meno una compagnia	btg.
 Comando corpo d'armata	C.A.	 Battaglione bersaglieri	btg.b.
 Comando corpo d'armata, autotrasportabile	C.A.at.	 Battaglione bersaglieri motociclisti	btg.b. motoc.
 Comando divisione fanteria	D.f.	 Battaglione genio	btg.g.
 Comando divisione celere (3 <sup>a</sup> )	D.cl.	 Battaglione camicie nere	btg.c.n.
 Comando divisione alpina	D.al.	 Comando battaglione fanteria	com. btg.f.
 Comando fanteria divisionale	f.Df.	 comando battaglione mortai	com. btg.m.
 Comando reggimento di fanteria	rgt.	 comando battaglione genio	com. btg.g.
 Comando reggimento di bersaglieri	rgt.b.	 comando compagnia di fanteria	com.cp.f.
 Comando reggimento di cavalleria	rgt.c.	 comando compagnia armi di accompagnamento	com. cp.acc.
 Comando gruppo camicie nere	gr.c.n.	 comando compagnia mortai	com. cp.m.

 comando compagnia cannoni controcarro	com. cp.c.c.	 batteria cannoni piccolo calibro divisionale	btr.
 compagnia fucilieri	cp.f.	 batteria a cavallo	btr.cav.
 compagnia comando reggimento	cp.c.rgt.	 batteria obici divisionale	btr.
 compagnia bersaglieri motociclisti	cp.b. motoc.	 batteria cannoni corpo d'armata	btr.
 compagnia carri L	cp.cr.L.	 batteria cannoni controaerei	btr.
 squadrone cavalieri	sqd.c.	 fucile mitragliatore	f.m.
 squadrone mitraglieri	sqd.mtr.	 mitragliatrice	mtr.
 compagnia genio	cp.g.	 mortaio da 45	m.a.
 compagnia movimento stradale	cp.mvt. str.	 mortaio da 81	m.81
 sezione carabinieri a piedi	sez.cc.	 cannone controcarro	c.c.c.
 sezione carabinieri a cavallo	sez.cc.c.	 stazione fotoelettrica	st.fe.
 plotone fucilieri	pl.f.	 sezione sanità	sez.sa.
 plotone camicie nere	pl.c.n.	 sezione assistenza	sez.su.



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## PRESENTATION

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Between the first writings published in Italy about the operations of the Army in World War II, two monographic studies of the Historical Office of the Army's General Staff are to be included. One of them appeared in 1946 under the title of "The 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army in the Second Defensive Battle of Don (11 December 1941 - January 31, 1943)"; the other is from 1947 and concerns "The operations of CSIR and ARMIR from June 1941 to October 1942".

Developed and printed under the hesitation of urgency, in order to report to the country with concern about the main circumstances that had led to the defeat of the Armed Forces and the events that had characterized CSIR's operation, the two books would not, could not be complete or exhaustive. At that time, the material available in the Archive was scarce and lacked, among other things, many Diaries of combat units. Even today there is some difficulty in reconstructing a faithful chronology of the Armed Forces Command, of which there is no other original document than a report compiled by General Gariboldi after his return to Italy.

The events of 8 September 1943 and the continuation of the war until 1945, with the presence of foreign armies on national territory, had caused extensive loss of precious documentary material, partially restored only in the late sixties.

Moreover, the testimony of the former German ally and of the former Soviet opponent were virtually nonexistent, or otherwise inaccessible.

However, even though incomplete and even in their modest structure - which, moreover, contained, albeit in summary, the whole and faithful narrative of the conduct of the operations - the two monographs have so far represented, in the opinion of many, as one

of the indispensable bases for a proper study of Russia's campaign.

During the thirty-one years since the end of the war, the availability of archive material and bibliography has increased gradually, so that every moment of the great conflict, for all the fronts in which it fought, can now be described with greater documentary possibilities.

For the Italian units operating in the Russian front, therefore, the opportunity was not only to complete and expand what was written on the "drum head" in 1946 and 1947, but also to bring the narrative of events into one volume of CSIR and of the 8th Army, from departure from Italy, in July 1941, until return to the Motherland of the last troop train with the remains of the II Army Corps in May 1943.

Hence the realization of this work, whose reason of being is not found, however, only in the grounds that have been said. It was mainly prepared with the trusted purpose of responding satisfactorily to the passionate interest that the country has always followed, and still follows, every manifestation concerning the presence of its soldiers on the soil of Russia.

The course of operations, in fact, the events of our ten divisions, their withdrawal from Don, Donez, Gomel and, above all, the fate of seventy-five thousand men no longer returning to the Motherland, are all events that still affect the sensitivity Italians.

Neither to attenuate the vivid interest in such facts was the great number of books (over a hundred) of memories, inquiries, essays, stories, newspaper articles and periodicals published after the war.

Commanders and officers of various degrees, non-commissioned officers, graduates [specialists], and simple soldiers - in their capacity as attendees and witnesses of those events - scholars, historians, journalists and publicists, have analyzed under all the different corners of life all the moments, Of Italian activity to the eastern front, developing in a particular way, and often exasperating it, the human twist of every individual reality. It has been written in Italy much more on the events of the Russian campaign, especially in retrospective of the fall of 1942, which was not for the campaigns of all the other fronts on which the Army fought.

In such a large number of works and manuscripts, however, the least developed and in-depth part is precisely that relating to the conduct of the actual war actions and the seventeen months of actual operations honored by the Italian units are generally mentioned only on dramatic days, for no army extol, by retreat. Which, as it is said in these first pages, has been provoked, among other things, by a ratio of forces to the Russians so overwhelming, as is documented from Soviet sources in Chapter XV and in *Drawing no. 36*, that no other army could resist an hour more.

It was therefore necessary to bridge this gap by publishing a broad and documented work on the conduct and the conduct of all small and large battles to which the Italian units participated.

A work such as the present, which is also intended to make justice to all the fighters in the Russian countryside indiscriminately, starting with those who were present at the first gunfire on the Bug River in August 1941, to those who took part in the Dnieper's Forces in the Battle of Petrikovka, the operations for the conquest of the Donez industrial basin, the Chazepetovka battle for winter settlements, the defensive battle of Christmas 1941, the maneuver of Krasnyj Luch, the battle of Serafimovic, at the first battle of Don and finally at the second, unfortunate defensive battle on the same front and subsequent retreat.

A volume, in short, containing the faithful story of the actions carried out by each of the Divisions in Russia, the three veterans of CSIR - *Pasubio*, *Torino* and *Celere* - to the seven arriving on the same front a year later, namely the Divisions *Sforzesca*, *Ravenna*, *Cosseria*, *Vicenza*, *Tridentina*, *Julia* and *Cuneense*,

The enlargement of the two old monographs can be found in each of the five parts in which this publication is articulated.

Some chapters of it are, in fact, entirely new, such as those relating to the synthesis of operations at the Russian front, the preliminaries of the war and the Italian intervention, the constitution, the transfer and the assembly of the units, the activity carried out By the Military War Tribunals.

But also the description of military operations, for the purposes that have been said, is here greatly expanded and enriched with details

So far unpublished, especially as far as the activity of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army is concerned, while in essence the argument about the feats of arms conduct remains unchanged.

The new text has also been accompanied, as is customary by the Historical Office, by numerous documents: battlefields, Italian and German operation orders, operational situations, messages, charts, etc., published for the first time.

The narration also contains the most important actions of the units of the Aeronautics, since the two groups operating on the Eastern Front, the Fighters and the Air Force were organically part of the CSIR first, and the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, afterward (1).

The naval formations of the Navy formations from May 1942 to May 1943 in the Black Sea and Lake Ladoga were not related to that of the Italian units of land and their actions were not described in this volume (2).

About the increased availability of documentary and bibliographic material, it includes, among other things:

- *For the documentary part:*

- \* Unit journals, reports of commanders of large and minor units and Chiefs of Staff, acquired at the Historical Office's archives after 1946;
- \* Documents and subsidiary charts taken after the events of 8 September 1943 by Germans to Germany, recovered by the US and stored in the USA and finally returned, as we have said, towards the end of the sixties;
- \* Diary of the Supreme Command (General Cavallero) acquired by the Archive in 1946 when the second monograph on operations in Russia (was published in 1947);
- \* "Marras Estate" consisting of documentation given to the Historical Office in November 1972 by General Efisio Marras

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(1) The operational activity of Air Force units located at the Russian front is more extensively described in the volume of Air Force General GIUSEPPE SANTORO: "L'Aeronautica italiana nella seconda guerra mondiale", Rome, 1957.

(2) See Publication " La Marina italiana nella seconda guerra mondiale, Volume XI, "Attività della Marina in Mar Nero e sul Lago Ladoga," Rome, 1962.



Military Attaché in Berlin and, during the war, also "Italian General at the General Headquarters of the German Military Forces";

- *for the bibliographic part:*

- \* Soviet official work in six volumes (for a total of four thousand pages), published between 1960 and 1965, entitled "History of Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941 - 1945" ("Istorija Velikoj Otecestvennoj Vojny Sovetskogo Sojuza" – "IVOVSS"), which, for reasons of practicality, will be referred to in this monograph from now on);
- \* Soviet official work in twelve volumes (six of which were published from 1973 to 1976) from the "History of the Second World War, 1939 – 1945" ("Istorija Vtoroj Mirovoj Vojny" - abbreviation used: "IVMV");
- \* Other Soviet publications of lesser importance and Edited magazines in the USSR;
- \* "War Diary of the Supreme Command of the German Armed Forces, 1940 - 1945" ("Bern Kriegstagebuch der Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht - Wehrmachtfiihrungstasb" - Bernard & Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen, Frankfurt am Main, 1965);
- \* Historical material relating to the Russian campaign listed in the seven volumes of the "Bibliographic survey on World War II, published by the Historical Office of the Army General Staff.

Regarding bibliographic sources, it should be pointed out that neither the IVOVSS nor the IVMV mention the presence of the Russian Expeditionary Corps (CSIR), while devoting only a few pages to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army. The German War Commander's diary records only the chronological course of operations.

\* \* \*

With this monograph as well as that relating to the operation of Logistics Services (3), the Historical Office has no claim to have exhausted and concluded the subject of the Russian campaign

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(3) HISTORICAL OFFICE OF THE GENERAL STAFF OF THE ARMY: "I Servizi logistici delle unità italiane al fronte russo (1941 - 1943)", 1975.

1941 - 1943 but believes that he has provided abundant material, all available today, for a better understanding of one of the main aspects of the Italian presence in the USSR during the Second World War, that is, concerning military operations.

It will then compete with historians to make appropriate use of such material to place it in the wider context of the history of our time, along with the political, economic, social and human aspects that make up the complex picture of the war.

THE HEAD OF THE HISTORICAL OFFICE

## INTRODUCTION



SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS AT THE RUSSIAN FRONT  
(1941-1945)

Germany's strategic goals in the war that it had taken against the USSR in June 1941 were the following (1):

*"The main objective was Moscow. To reach it, it was necessary to eliminate all threats from the north, ie to destroy the Russian forces deployed in the Baltic countries, occupy Leningrad and Kronstadt thus depriving the Russian Baltic fleet of its bases. In the South the first objective was Ukraine with Donbass (2), so according to the course of the subsequent operations, the Caucasus with its oil fields (Drawing No. 1).*

*"In the plans of the OKW (3), decisive importance was attached to Moscow's occupation. This, however, had to be preceded by the conquest of Leningrad. With this conquest numerous and important war purposes were achieved: the Baltic Russian fleet was deprived of its main bases; The city's armament industry was paralyzed; Leningrad could no longer serve as a trampoline for a counter-offensive that could have hit the bulk of German forces heading to Moscow. Above all, Leningrad was to be conquered first.*

*"The execution of the planned operations had to take place in several stages. The first goal was to reach the line: Kiev with a big bridgehead east of the Dnieper - Roslav - Smolensk, south and west territory of Lake Ilmen.*

*"The first provisions of the OKH (4) concerned only the operations necessary to reach this line. So there was a pause to give the troops a breather, to rearrange the units*

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(1) From the volume "Stalingrado" of Gen. FRIEDRICH PAULUS, pp. 150-151.

(2) Donez Basin.

(3) Acronym of the Supreme Command of the German Armed Forces (Ober Kommando der Wehrmacht).

(4) Acronym of the Supreme Command of the German Army (OberKommando des Heeres).

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



*and to reorganize the supply. Further operations were to be conducted according to the situation.*

*"For the North Army Group, it was only a short pause, because it, together with the 18<sup>th</sup> Army and the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored group on one side and the Finnish Army on the other, had to try to occupy Leningrad as soon as possible.*

*"In support of the North Army Group, substantial parts of the motorized units (3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Group) had to intervene, working with the Army Group Center. These, after reaching the Smolensk area, had the task of diverging northward and proceeding east of Lake Ilmen to contribute to the encirclement of Russian troops engaged in the Leningrad area and south - east of it.*

*"The Finnish army had to attain the old frontier of the country at first, and to proceed from this line only at the time of the Northern Army Group's decisive attack on Leningrad. OKW wanted to prevent the Finnish Armed Forces from acting on their own, could suffer a setback.*

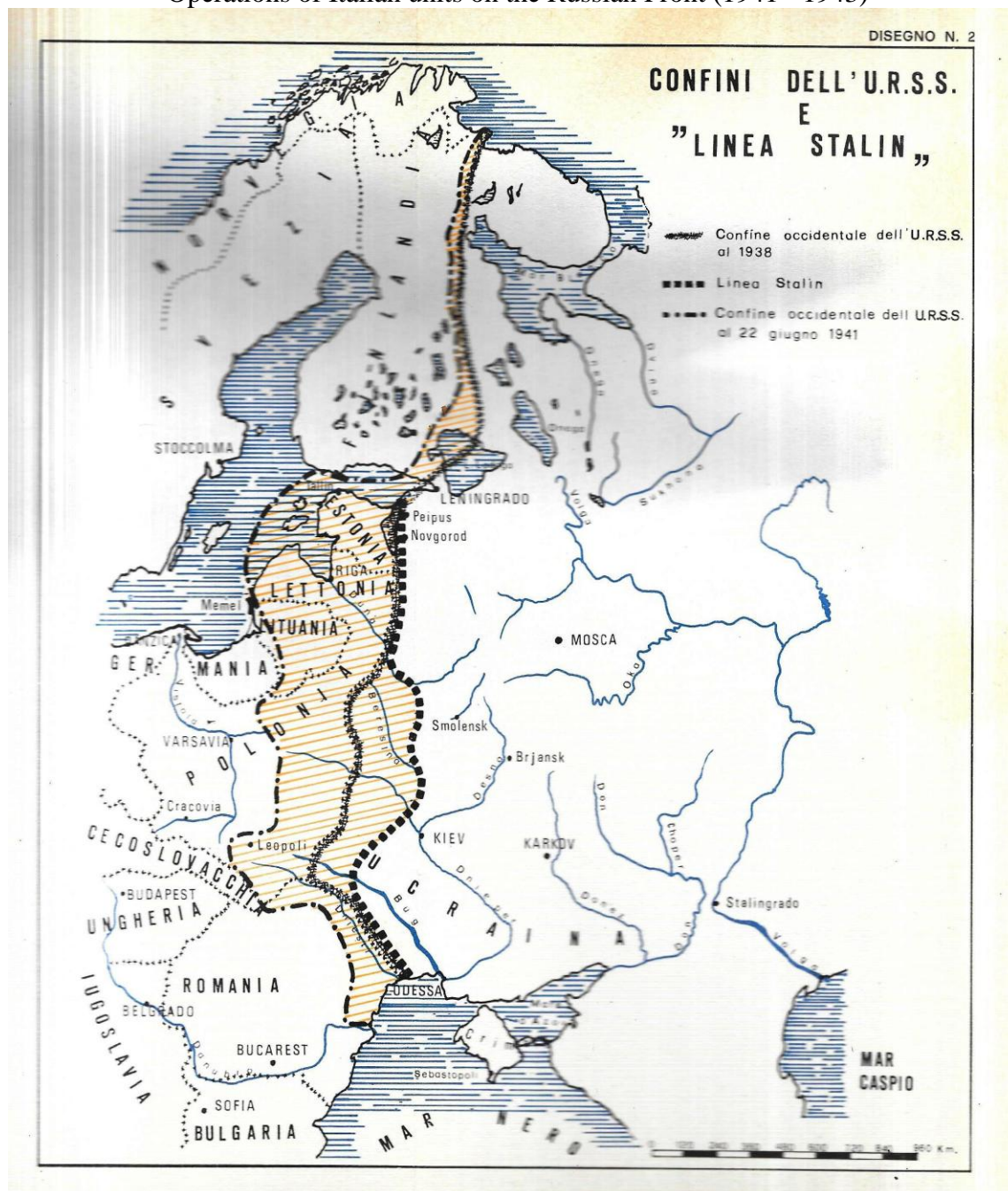
*"It was to be understood that these operations, in addition to other purposes, had to launch armored wedges in depth to annihilate the Russian forces and prevent the retreat from enemy forces still valid. It was calculated that to reach the above indicated line would take three to four weeks. And it was hoped to reach Moscow by the fall, before the time of bad weather.*

*"It was still to be seen when it would be possible to get to the Caucasus. In any case, with the timely establishment of a bridgehead south of Rostov, it was necessary to offer troops the opportunity to move forward in that direction. "*

For the USSR, however, the strategic problem posed by Germany's attack had two aspects: the first of them concerns the period prior to the acquisition of new territories (part of Finland, the Baltic states, parts of Poland, northern Bucovina and Bessarabia) , With permanent defensive and organized pitched battle within the old borders of the USSR itself; The second aspect concerns the period after the annexation of the aforementioned territories (Draw No 2).

In the earlier period, the "Stalin Line", a system of fortifications that, starting from the Gulf of Finland, touched the eastern shore of Lake Peipus and the marshes of Pripjat, became an essential element of the Soviet defense plan, to rejuvenate to the course

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)





of the Dniester. The line ran parallel to the borders, 1,800 kilometers long, between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. It was not as continuous as the Maginot, but adapted to natural obstacles, especially to rivers, marshes and forests. It had a depth cover range of 30 to 150 kilometers; with it the system of triangular airfields of Leningrad, Smolensk, Kiev and Odessa.

The variety of the works was great and their staggering depth differed according to the traits, which was greater in the Smolensk and Kyiv sectors.

The Stalin line was destined to accomplish a double task: defensive to protect the most important regions of western Russia; Offensive as it was a launch pad and a starting line for any attacks on the West.

At the end of this organization there were no great natural lines of obstacles to the Volga; Beyond this river were the great mountain ranges of the Urals; To the south, the Caucasus. But a gradual retreat on these lines, which would have inspired Kutuzov's old precepts (wear down the enemy and then attacking him with great mass when he was far from his bases and with the scattered forces), itself object to valid military and economic reasons, to which they added, aggravating them, those of internal politics. In fact, it was easily foreseeable that the short-term loss of much of the European Russia would, in addition to the inevitable moral repercussions on populations, lead to a serious blow to the USSR.

With the annexation of the new territories, and this is the second aspect of the Soviet strategic problem, the situation changed considerably since the shift of the USSR borders to the west created in front of the Stalin line an enormous uncovered and defenseless region, profound from 300 to 500 kilometers.

This caused considerable disturbance to the primitive plan of the Soviet Supreme State, which was a serious alternative: to deploy, that is, the main mass of forces in front of the Stalin line, adopting a definite offensive concept; or place the same mass behind or inside of the fortifications, abandoning all the newly acquired territories to the invader.

It was a compromise solution.

In fact, while confirming the validity of the Stalin line, continuing the work for its entirety, they moved to the west, on the new borders, several large units, and at the same time it was provided to cover the deployment of forces with strongholds, entrenchments

and other field works. So, a much more advanced coverage area was created than the Stalin line, a zone that would also have to represent a defensive position and at the same time a broad starting point for an offensive.

More specifically, in the event that Germany had taken the initiative of a war, the Soviets intended to secure the necessary conditions to ward off and disorganize the advancing enemy and then resist to the bitter end on the Stalin line.

In essence, in the Soviet area west of the Stalin line, a kind of delaying action would have been conducted to ward off advanced enemy pushes and to inflict a first rate of attrition even on the moving or deploying mass.

If Russia considered it appropriate to act offensively, the development of this operation could be expected, bearing in mind the strong concentration of Soviet units in the two salients of Bialystok and Leopoli and the lines of facilitation to the west of them.

Such was the strategic situation in Russia when it was attacked by Germany on 22 June 1941.

The forces deployed at that date on the opposite fronts (*Draw No 3*) amounted to about 7,750,000 men, of whom 3,050,000 Germans and 4,700,000 Russians.

The Germans were formed into three Armed Groups and in the Army "Norway"; in total 12 Armies. They combined a total of 145 divisions, of which 19 were armored, 15 motorized, 6 security and 2 were mountain.

Alongside the Germans, the allied forces of the Finnish, Slovak and Romanian (about 23 divisions, 3 cavalry brigades, 3 mountain brigades and the Motorized Brigade) also operated.

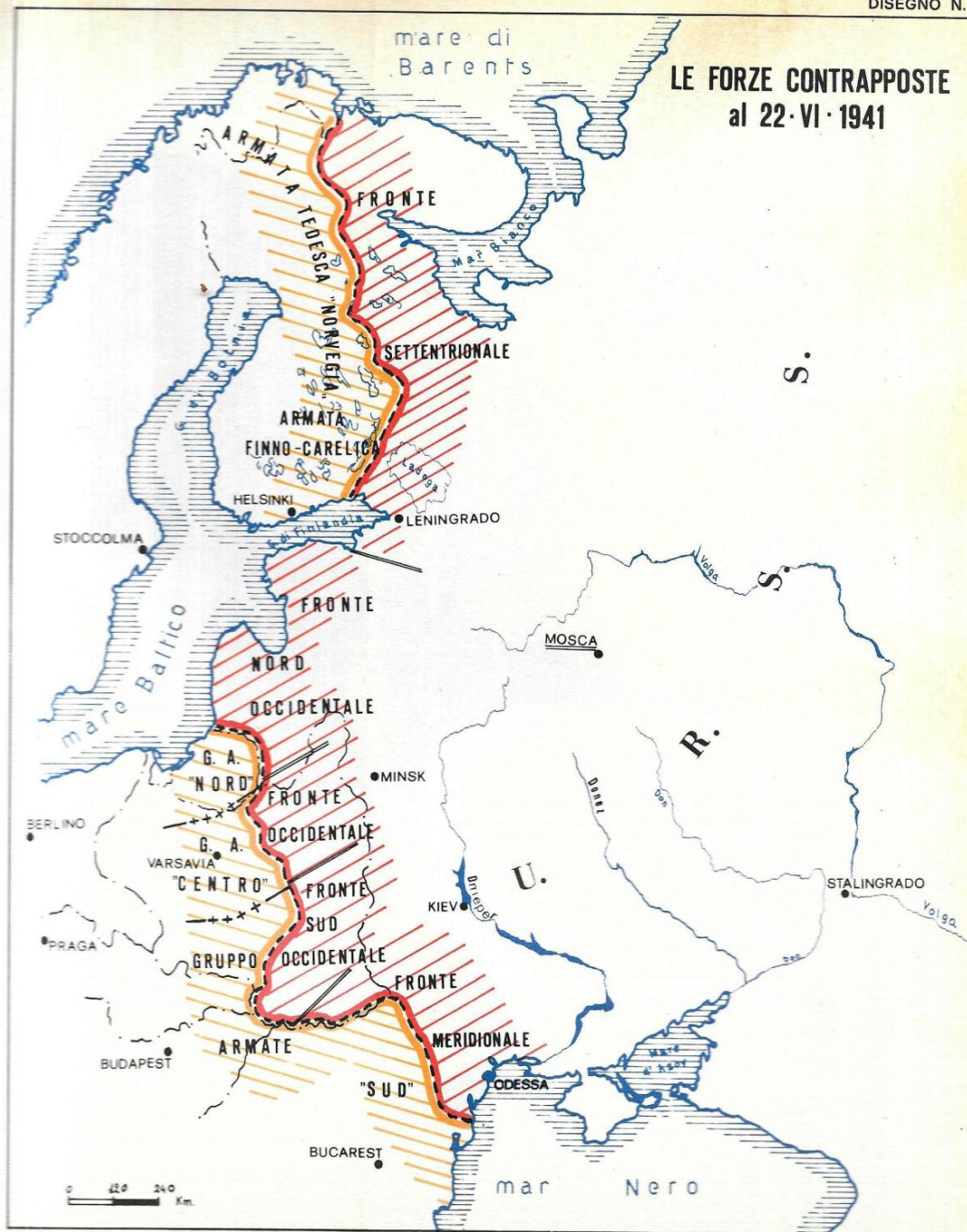
The Russians were formed in three Armed Groups that included 15 Armies. They were dispatched shortly before the conflict to the "Special Districts" of Leningrad, Baltic, Belarus, Kiev and Odessa. Overall (this is an approximate evaluation because there is no safe data) 118 Infantry Divisions, 20 Cavalry and 40 Armored and Motorized Brigades.

In particular, the Germanic deployment was so articulated:

- in the far North, the *Army of Norway*, under the command of General N. von Falkenhorst, in support of and with the contribution the Finnish forces, had the task of occupying the ports of Murmansk, on the Arctic Ocean and Kandalaksa on the White Sea, both

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

DISEGNO N. 3



at the base of the Kola peninsula, the first ice-free also during the winter season, the second linked to Leningrad by the Murmania railway. Moreover, Finnish forces would cooperate with the German actions in Carelia;

- in the German national territory, at the borders of Eastern Prussia, the Army Group North (5), commanded by Marshal von Leeb, with the 16th and 18th Armies and the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Group (6), had the task of destroying the Soviet forces of the Baltic, and crossing Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, pushing to Novgorod, to take over Leningrad (see Drawing No. 1), of the entire east coast of the Baltic. The Soviet Fleet therein allocated would therefore remain devoid of any bases. The Group itself would have cooperated with the units coming from Finland and would have received aid from the Center Group when it had taken Smolensk;

- in the southern part of Eastern Prussia and in the northern part of the territory of the General Governorate of Poland, the Army Group Center, attested at the demarcation line agreed in Moscow in 1939, commanded by Marshal von Bock, made up of 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Armies and Armored groups 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. It would have to move on the Bialystok - Minsk - Smolensk - Moscow (see Drawing No. 1), pushing its wings forward to overthrow the enemy forces dispersed in White Russia. When it came to Smolensk's possession, it would cooperate with the Northern Group to achieve the destruction of the enemy forces of the Baltic and Leningrad.

A possible success of this Great Unit could have demoralizing effects on the entire U.S.S.R. population, due to the enormous political and emblematic value of the capital, in addition to being of primary importance in the railway communications system;

- from Galicia to the foothills of Prut (in Romania), the South Army Group, commanded by Marshal von Rundstedt, consisted of 6<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Armies, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Group. The 6<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> armies, with the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Group, would operate from Galicia to Lviv, Kyiv and the bend of the Dnieper (see Drawing No. 1).

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(5) That is, the fraction of the army, intermediate between the whole army and the single army, equivalent to the "Group of Armies".

(6) "Panzergruppe", equivalent to an army. The "armored groups" were then called Armored Armies.

From the Soviet side, five "Fronts" (7) were deployed to defend themselves:

- *Northern Front* (Armies 14<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>), commanded by General Popov, covering the Petsamo - Narva River. The main core of the forces was located in the northern salients, towards Leningrad;

- *North-Western Front* (Armies 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>), commanded by General Kuznetsov, presided over the territories of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (republics belonging to the USSR only since 1940 and for this reason the permanent fortification was just beginning);

- *Western Front* (Armies 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>), commanded by General Pavlov, deployed to cover the most important strategic direction, namely the one directed against Moscow, the capital of the USSR and a very important communication node;

- *South-Western Front* (Armies 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>), commanded by General Kirponos, headquartered in the area corresponding to the southwest operations line, from the Pripjat River to Belec;

- *Southern Front* (Armies 18<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>), commanded by General Tjulieniev, deployed astride the line of operations of Odessa.

Shortly after the start of the hostilities, an intermediate link of the chain of command was established for the difficulties encountered by the Soviet General Staff to exercise direct command over the "Fronts". The High Commands were thus constituted: "North-West" (Voroscilov); "West" (Timosceno); "South - West" (Budiennj), all abolished, however, in the summer of 1942.

And here, in summary, according to the criterion adopted by Soviet historiography, the performance of operations subdivided into "Campaigns", or operating cycles.

CAMPAGN OF THE SUMMER - AUTUMN 1941. - It includes the period from the beginning of the conflict to early December 1941, that is until the beginning of the Soviet counter-offensive on Moscow that removed the German threat from the capital.

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(7) In Soviet military terminology, the word "Front" refers to a group of forces operating under one command, corresponding to a group of Armies.

It can be divided into two phases: the first, about three weeks, that is until mid-July, during which the Soviet units, surprised and disoriented by the power of the German attack, were severely defeated and had to retreat deeply with heavy losses.

At this stage, the Soviets impressed exceptional efforts on the transformation of industries and the economy, from the production of peace to the demands of the war, the mobilization was completed and the Armed Forces in the forefront were completed; the eastward transfer of factories, industries and deposits from the regions threatened by the German attack began.

In the second phase (mid-July - early December), the Russian Army began to oppose the more successful and organized resistance of its units to the attack of the German armored columns, but they still had to retreat for hundreds of kilometers, losing, besides numerous fallen, hundreds of thousands of prisoners, thousands of tanks, cannons, and planes.

With tenacious defensive battles and at the cost of hard sacrifices, in this second phase, Russian soldiers managed to curb the impetus of the attackers and impose their downtime, thus giving the Soviet Supreme Command to fully plan the conduct of the war and the means to operate properly. After about six months of fierce struggle and timely action, the Soviet Armed Forces stopped the German columns under Leningrad, ahead of Moscow and the western sector of Donez, creating the conditions for switching to counter-offensive in the capital area.

*During this campaign, in August 1941, the Italian Expeditionary Corps in Russia, part of the 11<sup>th</sup> Germanic Army belonging to the "South Army Group", came into action and deployed along the lower course of the Dniester.*

*CSIR initially participated in the operations of the encirclement of the Russian units remaining between the Dniester and the Bug during their retreat to the east; intervened in Petrikovka's maneuver, part of the great Dnieper battle, in which the Russian Armies unsuccessfully attempted to arrest the Germanic advance on the river; Then took part in the offensive operations for the conquest of the Donez industrial basin until the occupation of the industrial districts of Gorlovka and Rykovo, where the CSIR conquest cycle ended. Enter into this operational cycle also the defensive combat of CSIR units at Nikitouk.*

WINTER 1941 - 1942 CAMPAIGN. - It mainly relates to the Soviet winter offensive and includes the period of early December 1941 - end of April 1942.

In this offensive, which took place eight hundred kilometers in front, from Kalinin to Elez, the Russians inflicted heavy losses on the Germans (particularly the Army Group Center), advancing to the west for 150 to 400 kilometers; Forced the adversary to abandon the regions of Moscow and many other departments of Kalinin and Leningrad, but did not remove the German blockade of the city; Began to regain the regions of Orel, Smolensk, Crimea and Ukraine, recovering many cities in the motherland, including Kalinin, Kaluga, Kerc, Elez and others. In Ukraine, after breaking up the deployment of the 17<sup>th</sup> German Army, the Soviets created in January - February a large salient deep about one hundred kilometers and a wide eighty west to Izjum (south - east of Karkov). *At the counteroffensive of Germanic units to eliminate the salient of Izjum, which threatened the Dniepropetrovsk - Stalino railway and the whole southern front to the sea, also participated in CSIR units.*

*Previously, in December, CSIR had backed the offensive battle of Chazcpctooka and the defensive first and then the Christmas counter-offensive.*

SUMMER - AUTUMN 1942 CAMPAIGN. - It includes the period from early May to mid November and is also divided into two phases: the first one ends at the end of June. At this stage, the Soviets conducted offensive actions near Karkov and Demjansk, but did not come to any positive result. At the same time the Soviets had to defend themselves against the offensive in Crimea by the Germans who conquered Kerc and Sevastopol.

In the second phase, the end of June - mid-November, the initiative went completely into the hands of the Germans, which spread eastward to occupy the large Don bend, crossed the same river in the south sector and extended their control to the Northern Caucasus. Here the movement of the Germanic units had to stop without reaching the Caspian Sea due to the weakness of the logistic support, the bitter nature of the terrain and the tenacious resistance of the Soviets.

The purpose of the Germans in their great offensive was to destroy the "South-Western Front" and the "Southern", to occupy the boundless regions of Don and Kuban, to take over the Caucasus, to force the Volga in the Stalingrad region and to create

a situation which makes it impossible for the USSR, according to German plans, to continue the war. As it was a year before, in the summer of 1941, the Soviet units had to fall back in the midst of fierce fighting under the pressing pressure of the opponent.

But while the defensive battles under Stalingrad and on the Caucasus slopes continued, the Soviet commands prepared the plans and conditions necessary to turn the tide of the war in their favor and turn to the general counter-offensive.

This counter-offensive began on Nov. 19<sup>th</sup> on the Stalingrad front, where the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Romanian Armies were attacked and defeated, and where the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army and part of the 4<sup>th</sup> German Armored Army were completely encircled.

*At this stage of the war, the Italian Expeditionary Corps in Russia was increased from the strength of an Army Corps with three divisions to that of an Army, the 8<sup>th</sup>, with three Army Corps for a total of ten divisions. To the pre-existing Divisions of CSIR Pasubio, Turin and Celere, the Infantry Divisions Sforzesca, Ravenna, Cosseria and Vicenza and the Alpine Divisions Tridentina, Julia and Cuneense were added.*

*Some of these units (3<sup>rd</sup> Celere, Sforzesca and Pasubio) participated in the operations that led to the conquest of the Mius - Krasnyj Lach coal basin (11-22 July); To the battle (fought between 30 July and 21 August) for the elimination of the Soviet Bridgehead of Scrafimovic (3<sup>rd</sup> Celere); At the first defensive battle of Don, fought from 20 August to 1 September, against Soviet units engaged in actions to lighten the ongoing operations on the Stalingrad front. Almost all units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army took part, and the battle was completed by two Alpine battalions of the Alpine Corps of the Alpine Corps. The Soviet attack did not succeed, but with the expansion of the Russian bridgeheads on the right bank of the Don, the premises for the further development of the offensive actions of the Red Army were created in the next battle of December.*

WINTER 1942 - 1943 CAMPAIGN - It lasted about four and a half months, exactly from 19 November 1942 to the end of March 1943, and, as has been said, marked the beginning of the overturning of the war in favor of Russians.

During this campaign they defeated and wiped out the southern wing of the German deployment, overwhelming



Six enemy armies, including the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army, deployed the area north of the Caucasus, Stalingrad, Rostov, and a number of other areas occupied by the Germans in the summer of 1941 and 1942; they also managed to partially unlock the siege of Leningrad.

With the development and outcome of these battles, the initiative of the operations passed definitively into the hands of the Russians who kept it until the end of the war.

*During this winter campaign 1942 - 1943, the Soviet Supreme Command decided to "encircle and destroy the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army and the German Operations Group Hollidt", defended in the middle Don. The Soviet offensive, called "Operation Little Saturn" began on 11 December, involving the Italian Divisions Cosseria, Ravenna, Pasubio, Torino, 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere and Sforzesca, to which was added, during the battle, also the Julia. The development of this battle that was decisive for the fate of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and the events of the Alpine Corps on January 15, 1943 in Operation Ostrogozsk-Rossosc, are particularly described in Part Three, Chapter XV.*

Between January 31<sup>st</sup> and February 2<sup>nd</sup>, Paulus' German forces came to Stalingrad. The resistance of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army and the Don Army Group allowed the German Armed Forces in the North Caucasus to escape the Soviet attack by their operation on Rostov; the goal could not be achieved by the Russians "for the availability of the Forces and means necessary" (8).

Again, in the context of the great offensive that began on November 19, 1942, the Russians, continuing their advance to the west, liberated Kursk and Belgorod falls for maneuver, and on February 16<sup>th</sup> they regained Karkov, eventually arrested 70 kilometers west of this city.

As of January 29, the Soviet offensive was, in the meantime, developing in the Donez basin, where the German forces were pushed west 130 to 230 kilometers. The German units, withdrew from the Caucasus and the upper course of the Donez, had formed a concentration of forces in the northern part of Donez to attempt a counter-offensive that then succeeded. The Soviet Command, in fact, had erroneously estimated that the Hitlerians would withdraw their forces from the Donez basin to defend themselves along the Dnieper. Thus, the German counter-offensive (called in Germany

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(8) "Velikaja Otecestvennaja Vojna Sovetskogo Sojuza (Kratkaja Istorija)", page 221.

the “miracle of Donez ”), came totally unforeseen for the Soviets who lost again in mid-March, Kharkov, Belgorod and the area north - east of the Don basin.

In the central sector of the front, the Soviets eliminated in early March the salients of Rzev and Vjazma.

The whole line then stabilized temporarily.

THE CAMPAIGN OF THE SUMMER - WINTER 1943. - It grew from the beginning of July to the whole month of December. On July 5, the German Command turned an offensive against the Kursk salient that the Soviets absorbed and held with persistent resistance. They begin here also the counter-offensive with a gigantic battle begun on July 12<sup>th</sup>. More than three million men were lined up on opposite sides, and the battle ended with a heavy defeat for the Germans. The Russian offensive developed on a front of about 1,500 kilometers, from Velikie Luki to the Azov Sea. The Dnieper was forced, where the Russians established an important bridgehead on the right bank of the river, the North Caucasus reoccupation was completed and operations for the removal of the Germans from Belarus were initiated.

In summary, from November 1942 to December 1943, the Soviet Army had regained more than half of the territory occupied by the Germans in 1941 and 1942.

Waiting for the offensive, at the end of 1943, the Russian Armies awaited, roughly, on the line: west of Leningrad, Vitebsk, Mozyr, west of Kiev, Kirovograd, low course of the Dnieper. The Crimean German forces were isolated.

With the definitive strategic initiative in the hands of the Soviets, the Germans had no choice but to defend themselves on the vast front, on a slender “eastern wall” resting on the waterways.

WINTER 1943 - SPRING 1944 CAMPAIGN. - It took place from January to May. It encompasses a great offensive during which the Red Army units were able to push back to Estonia the German forces that had been ringing Leningrad for thirty months.

In the southern part of the front, from the marshes of Pripjat to the Black Sea, the coordinated action of Soviet offensive efforts against a defensive, indeed, shallow, excessive rigid organization

and lacking adequate reserves, allowed Russian troops to reach the Carpathians in mid-April and fully recapture the Crimea.

The new military situation had an impact on the political scene as it pushed Romania and Finland into armistice negotiations. Immediately after, respectively in August and September, they will declare war on Germany, allied to them until recently.

**CAMPAIGN OF THE SUMMER - AUTUMN 1944.** - It embraces the period June to December.

During this campaign, the Soviet Armed Forces reconquered the entire of the USSR. They also occupy the north of Norway, the eastern regions of Poland, part of Czechoslovakia, the whole of Romania and Bulgaria.

Considering the upheavals of the Vistula, when the Red Army was arrested in July, the partisan formations of the Armies - Krajova (the clandestine organization of the Polish resistance in London) attacked the German occupation and held temporally the control of Warsaw. But the Soviets did not go straight ahead and stopped for about six months on the river. During this uprising Nazi repression took place in the Polish capital.

The large movement of Soviet forces on the rest of the front continued until autumn, when they came into contact with the Yugoslav partisan formations and also reached the heart of Hungary.

The German Commanders were forced to design and implement a delayed maneuver aimed at allowing the long withdraw of their units in Greece and Yugoslavia.

**WINTER 1944 - SPRING 1945 CAMPAIGN.** - After reorganizing and upgrading the offensive positions, and after refining the functionality of the logistics system, on January 12, the Soviets reopened offensive action, with a certain advance on the scheduled date Followed by the pressure of the Western allies who had come to a halt in their advance after the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes.

They occupied Warsaw in January, Budapest in February and Vienna in April. A last offensive push brought the Red Army near Berlin, which fell on May 2<sup>nd</sup>.

PART ONE  
THE ITALIAN PRESENCE ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION



## CHAPTER I

### RUSSIAN-GERMAN WAR PRELIMINARIES AND THE ITALIAN INTERVENTION

A letter sent by Hitler to Mussolini on November 20, 1940 from Vienna (1) confirmed the resistance of a constant confrontation between Germany and the USSR, a contradiction to the agreements of August 1939 seemed to have alleviated. While expressing the conviction that the conflict between the two Powers was not near, Hitler claimed to consider "the necessity, as a premise for a safe conclusion of this war (2), of the existence of a German Army ... strong enough to meet any eventuality in the east... even just possible. The more visibly powerful this force is, the less likely it will have to come into action for such an unexpected case."

In order to have that force, Germany was concentrating on the borders of the Soviet Union an ever-increasing mass of Great Units.

The Soviet Union, facing that threat, at least potential, had to respond in a similar and proportionate way.

The states connected with Germany followed the example of the coalition leader country and, day after day, the armed conflict appeared increasingly inevitable.

The Italian Military Attachés in the diplomatic representations of those states indicated the progressive aggravation of the situation at the borders.

The Military Attaché in Moscow on March 29, 1941, reported the move of Soviet Great Units from the Far East to Europe and signaled General Tiulienev's allusions to Germany as an enemy.

Even from Bucharest, as early as in Moscow, between April 18 and May 1, progressive demonstration the progressive refinement of the Soviet and German military

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(1) "Hitler and Mussolini: Letters and Documents", Rizzoli, p. 87.

(2) At that time only conducted against Great Britain.

deployments was reported, on the western border of the USSR, both supporting fortification and building roads. The conclusion was inferred that the outbreak of hostilities would become more likely to occur (*Document No. 1*).

The Italian Ministry of War received a long telegraph report on the probable German war actions, including the one against the Soviet Union, on May 7 by the Military Attaché in Berlin and on the possibility of coordinating this with the ongoing war in North Africa. The details of the operations and objectives were presented in a rather circumspect manner, but it was evident that the source of information to which Mr Marras had been summoned had tried to mislead the attention of his interlocutor in other directions (*Document No. 2*).

New news from Bucharest on May 21 confirmed the continuing deterioration of the situation, which, in the same intensified Soviet military predicament, found new motives of greater tension.

A report by General Marras, shipped from Berlin on May 30, stated that a possible German war action against the USSR for a long time had been explored with the essential goals of eliminating the threat to the east and ensuring food supplies and raw materials. Germany was deemed to be justified by the fact that was annexed by the Soviet Union, the Baltic States, Bessarabia and North Bucovina, as well as incomplete execution of agreed supplies agreements. It was planned to last for three months, and perhaps even less. The starting date was considered imminent (*Document No. 3*). Similar news came from Bucharest.

On the basis of this information, at 12:00 on May 30, in an interview with General Cavallero (Chief of the Italian General Staff General), Mussolini decided to set up a Expeditionary Corp to be sent to the Russian Front and commissioned the same Chief of the General Staff General to execute his order.

On May 31, Moscow reported to Rome that 129 infantry divisions, 21 cavalry, 5 divisions and 36 Soviet armored brigades were on the borders, gathered in two main masses around Bialystok and Leopoli, probably with defensive intentions.

On June 2, a meeting between Mussolini and Hitler did not provide any new information or decisions. That same day

was the news from Berlin of the suspension of several hundred railway convoys and the eastward shift of other German divisions from the North Sea and Channel areas.

On June 4, the Italian Military Attaché in Bucharest was informed that the Soviet Legion in that capital, keeping in constant contact with Moscow, demolished some of its archives and destroyed the rest.

The June 5 report on "Strength and Deployment of the Germanic Army," sent to Rome by General Marras, describes the likely distribution of the German Divisions, dispersed from Finland to the Black Sea, from France to Northern Italy. Out of that mass, only 62 divisions, equal to  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the total, were unable to participate, more or less readily, in operations against the Soviet Union.

New telegraphic information from Berlin arriving at the evening of June 6 reconfirmed that while the German official bodies were in great calm, the massive deployment of forces aimed at obtaining Soviet capitulation politically. Meanwhile, however, other forces were moved to the east. It was not excluded that the current situation could last for another two or three weeks.

On June 9, a telegram from Bucharest signaled in Rome that the approach of Soviet units at the frontier allowed immediate entry into action; He also indicated the continued exodus of the populations, aerial reconnaissance, the presence of tanks, and also reported warlike speeches of Soviet officers.

New news from Berlin confirmed the precedents and indicated even as probable starting date of operations one day between June 20 and early July (*Document No. 4*)

On the basis of so many and so-concordant information coming from various sources that came to him both as Supreme Commander and Minister for the Three Armed Forces, and as Head of Government, Mussolini, at 12:00 on June 14 conferring with General Cavallero, The conviction of "inevitability of a conflict between Germany and Russia".

On June 14th, Colonel Valfré, Military Attaché in Bucharest, announced that the Romanian - German front would probably remain for the first two or three weeks on the defensive and that the beginning of the conflict was expected between 20 and 25 June.



On June 15, in Venice, the German Foreign Minister informed his Italian colleague of the German intention to submit to the Soviet Union final demands. In case of refusal, Germany would start war operations.

On the same day, a telegram from the Military Attaché Office in Berlin informed that hostilities between Germany and the USSR could have been opened within a week.

Again on the same day, General Marras, in a three-person interview with Mussolini and the Chief of General Staff, confirmed the fighting spirit of the German forces and indicated their strategic goals: Leningrad, Moscow, Odessa (*See Drawing No. 1*).

News from Berlin became more and more detailed, so for dates as for operational projects. Among them, one reconfirmed German intentions to obtain an improvement in the Mediterranean situation by peaceful agreements with Turkey (*Document No. 5*)

On June 20, General Marras announced what the German Supreme Commander's assessment was about the Soviet forces deployed in front of the Germanic ones: about 192 divisions. It also summed up the magnitude of the military contributions of the Finnish, Hungarian, and Romanian allies, and suggested that the Italian Expeditionary Corp would be included between the Hungarian and the Romanian Units in order to avoid its direct disagreeable contact (*Document No. 6*).

On the evening of June 21, General Marras, at 18:30, telegraphed from Berlin that the decisive phase of German-Soviet tension had come to the top: Hitler was about to receive the USSR Ambassador. There was still a line of hope for an unlikely Soviet capitulation, incompatible with all the warlike apparatus of the two sides, deployed as has been described so far, according to the official findings of that time.

At 19:30 a new telegram from Berlin announced the sending of a letter from Hitler to Mussolini and the German acceptance of the presence of a Expeditionary Corp to represent Italy on what was already called the "Russian front."

At 21:00 on the same day, June 21, General Marras telephoned to the Chief of Cabinet of the Ministry of War: "It is possible tomorrow."

At the dawn of Sunday, June 22, the Councilor of the German Embassy in Rome delivered to the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



the announced letter from Hitler to Mussolini, with which the former officially participated in the second at the beginning of military operations against the Soviet Union.

In that message Hitler also expressed his thanks for sending the Italian Expeditionary Corps to work against the USSR alongside the German Armed Forces.

*"If that is your intention, Duce - that I naturally welcome with a heart full of gratitude - there will be enough time for it to be accomplished, since in such a large war theater the advance will not be able to come and go all over at the same time" 3).* This is a reference to the "Barbarossa Plan", which foresees for a second time the entry into operation of the German Armed Forces (in which CSIR was later included) in the southern area of the front.

He continued: *"The decisive aid, Duce, you can always provide him by strengthening your forces in North Africa ..."*

Conclude: *"Please let me know directly or to agree by means of your military offices with my Supreme Command all the "desires", the suggestions and the aids that you, Duce. you will want to send to me in the present circumstance. "*

Even in Moscow that same morning, the Reich Ambassador went to the USSR Foreign Ministry to notify the war declaration of his government. He was also informed by a telegraphic communication of the Italian Military Attaché.

Meanwhile, the three Italian Divisions of the Expeditionary Corps were completing their preparations at their respective mobilization centers.

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(3) "Hitler and Mussolini," op. Cit., Page 102.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ENVIRONMENT

The eastern theater of operations in which, between 1941 and 1943, fought on some large Italian units possesses as salient features those of the particular vastness, uniformity and absence of mountain reliefs.

In it the Italian Great Units reached, as the eastern limit of the area of operations, the course of the Don, after crossing the vast expanse of the Ukrainian plain. They recrossed them during their retreat, turning northwest into White Russia, in the Gomel - Bobrujsk area, where they were repatriated. To the south they reached almost the Black Sea and the Azov Sea, to the north they touched Minsk on the 51<sup>st</sup> parallel.

Such a setting was the usual characteristic of the southern sloping Russian plateau, a plateau of low average elevation, which slopes to the south with almost sloppy slope, with undefined boundaries to the west as a continuation of the flat area of central Europe.

However, the absence of mountain ranges does not mean that the plateau is a plain, as it reveals a whole series of even weak ripples. These hills, in turn, are subject to the erosion of rainwater, which, in their turn, forms steep slopes and balconies. the "balche"

The plain is covered with a deep black earth coat, formed for the ancient cleavage of grassy plants within a subgrade made up of a finer arena. This is the typical land of Russia, from the Black Sea to the Middle Volga, to Saratov and the Central Urals, a real country of cereal crops.

This fertile soil, however, when it is drenched with rain or melting water, becomes viscous and difficult to transit, not just for normal cars, but also for tracked vehicles, draft animals and pedestrians.

The most conspicuous element of the Russian natural landscape is the presence of watercourses, decisive for demographic, communication, economic development and

exercised great influence on the life of the people. No less important was to determine the performance of military operations considered.

The main rivers encountered by Italian units during their stay at the Russian front are among the largest in Europe.

From west to east were: Dniester (1), Bug (2), Dnieper (3), Donez (4) and Don (5). They are all typical rivers of plain, with short spring currents caused by the melting of snow, with long periods of frost.

The weak slope, determined by the scarcity of difference between the springs and the mouth of the rivers, is due to the slowness of the currents and the sinuousness of the long paths. This results in the ease of freezing of their surface, even for considerable thickness, to become a cargo carrier and such a thing as to leave such impoverished rivers as important.

Another characteristic feature of the rivers in southern Russia is that they have the west side overhanging, sometimes over a hundred meters, on the bank opposite of the east.

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(1) Source in the northern slopes of the Carpathians, 1,382 km, reaches into the Black Sea east of Odessa, a basin of 80,000 km<sup>2</sup>, average flow 400 m<sup>3</sup> per second, navigable.

(2) Named more properly the Southern Bug, to distinguish it from the homonymous tributary of the Vistula. Source in Poland, 780 km long, reaches the Black Sea east of Odessa, navigable for the last 130 kilometers.

(3) Third Russia river after Volga and fourth in Europe. Source in Rialto del Valdai, run 2.201 km, mouths in the Black Sea, basin of 504,000 km<sup>2</sup>. It has difficulty navigating for freezing, rapids, sand banks.

(4) Source at Kursk, a route of 1,083 km, basin of 38,138 km<sup>2</sup>.

It flows into Don to the east of Rostov. Navigable to the valley of Izjum (that area was the northernmost in which Italian units operated in the first half of 1942).

(5) Fourth River of Russia and Sixth in Europe. Source at Lake Ivan, near Tula, reaches the Azov sea, at Taganrog, 1,870 km long, with a basin of 422,000 km<sup>2</sup>. "It runs a wide bend with the convexity to the east, by which it approaches Volga at the only 60 km (between Kalac and Stalingrad, today Volgograd). The middle course of the river crosses a low steppe area where the bed is deeply dug into limestone or cretaceous masses with rocky and steep shores. Don has a width ranging from 100 to 300 meters, up to a maximum of 500. The average flow rate of the river is 900 m<sup>3</sup> per second, with the minimum in August and another during the frost. It is navigable from Kalac, in the eastward direction where it is closer to the Volga, to the mouth and is subject to freezing for about 120 days a year.

In the northern part of the territory run by Italian units, towards Tchernigov, Konotop, Sumy and Karkov, the land is richly dressed in forests, with the continuation of the Poles. They pose a special note in the landscape and also give it the operational characteristic of facilitating guerrilla and surprise actions.

In the southern part of the same area stretches the steppe, littered with arboreal vegetation, run by the winds, always impetuous, dusty and burning during the hot season, lurking during the long months of frost, when they raise snowy ice turbines that hurt like pin stings.

Large areas of this area, taken from forests or steppe, are grown on cereals, maize, sunflower, with the characteristic that the tall stems of the latter cover large areas of land.

The dwellings, generally broadly spaced in that vast corner of the country, at any level of importance, possessed a remarkable military value, both logistic and tactical.

The presence of the new industrial cities, particularly dense in CSIR's operating sector in the winter of 1941-1942, offered not only tactical attachments for warlike action but also shelter from the weather, manufactured to the locations of logistics establishments, rail nodes for long distance communications.

The Stalino mining and industrial district complex (6), Donez mines, or Donbass, was a small world apart from the high density of the inhabitants, due to the dense railway and road network, to the west of buildings, not centrally located in one metropolis but subdivided into a constellation of some cities of medium demographic importance, constituting, as a whole, an important human and economic phenomenon.

The characteristic feature of the landscape of that region is the heaps of the debris of the coal mines, accumulated in high cones, erected close to the caves themselves.

The richness of coal resources in that area represented more than half of the total production of the USSR and was integrated with the presence of the iron deposits of Krivoj Rog, located at the not-relevant distance of about 300 kilometers. The chemical industry

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(6) Stalino, formerly called Jusovka when it was an agricultural village, now carries the name of Donezk. It was already a large city of hundreds of thousands of inhabitants.

was represented by a vast plant for the production of synthetic nitrogen in Gorlovka and the mechanical - steel plant of a railroad factory and railway locomotives in Rykovo (7).

The distinctive industrial modernity of the entire area of Donez, in which the Italian units operated between November 1941 and July 1942, was strongly opposed to the traditional farming of the Don area, where it fought from August 1942 to January 1943.

In this vast empty tract land were the cities that are of purely local importance. Their constructions, extensively intertwined, were those wooden features, with one or two floors, and featured only modern school buildings, largely used for military hospitals or command posts. The agricultural population was living in villages of varying importance, scattered in the steppe, just to facilitate the inhabitants in their daily work transfers.

Essential characteristics of the Russian climate are the strong differences between winter and summer temperatures, and their relative uniformity on vast expanses of territory, evident in direct relation to the monotony of its forms. If Southern Russia benefits from a more early and longer summer, winter is subject to temperatures no less than those of the Arctic regions (Voroscilovgrad: - 40.8 C; Poltava: - 31.4 C).

Russian winter is almost everywhere stricter than in other European regions of equal latitude due to the influence exerted by the cold currents from within Asia. The winter isotherm lines follow the course of the meridians, so that in January, the highest average temperature in Ukraine is the average January temperature lower than that found in North Cape.

The beginning of the winter season is generally premature. The first frosts begin to occur at the end of September. As a result of frost, when the phenomenon lasts for entire days, the atmosphere becomes dry. The rate of stormy winds and sudden temperature fluctuations are the causes of the greatest discomfort of that season. However, it is the most conducive to communications,

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(7) The city had almost 100,000 inhabitants. His pre-revolutionary denomination of Jenakievo, changed to Rykovo first and later Ordzonikidse, during the period of occupation had returned to that of Rykovo. Now the first name has been restored. This is the topic because geographic maps can find any of the three names.

due to the frost, which makes the soil compact and practicable everywhere, and deeply freezing the surface of the rivers, makes them crossable at every point.

At the melting of the snow, in the period of “raspùtitza” or mud, the land of southern Russia becomes all impassable, not excluding roads, even if cobbled. The only existing highway (Kiev - Brjansk - Moscow) kept the condition of travel.

A short spring break, usually in April, marks the driest period of the year. Sudden melting produces in full, sometimes ruinous amounts.

In June, the rapid rise in temperature causes a strong evaporation of surface water and even the lowering of the groundwater. The vegetation develops rapidly and the warmth of air equals that of Western Europe. During this period, frequent and violent thunderstorms occur and the rain, which the ground can not absorb, acts on it eroding its surface.

The average summer temperatures are similar to those of the Padana plain, including the maximum of this. However, summer remains the wettest period of the year, as rainy precipitation varies between 1/3 and 2/5 of the whole year.

The population was almost entirely Slavic, save the presence of small minorities of Jews and Germans; But in Ukraine the vast majority (80%) were Ukrainians, who spoke their distinct language, if so similar, to the Russian language. The Germans sought to promote the resumption of that nationality, with obvious future political ends.

All affiliated civilian life activities appeared in great crisis or even non-existent.

The occupying authority was endowed with all power, also because the central Soviet authorities had withdrawn all the people who were invested in public office, abandoning the civilian population. The occupants had to be supported by local elements, including those enlisted in a police body, highly discredited to the people who saw him as foreigners. These, in turn, did not take it into consideration, as they found little loyalty.

To accentuate the disadvantages of the population, the intervention of the German occupation authority which issued calls for employment in Germany, to which Men and women were subject,



with few exceptions. It was not uncommon for Russians to be hired to serve Italian units in order to escape that form of deportation.

In relations with Italian occupiers, the population behaved very well and rarely were cases of direct confrontation, indeed it was quite easy to establish friendly terms, or at least mutual tolerance.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE OPPONENT: NOTES ON THE SOVIET ARMY (1941-1942)

*The disciplinary principles* governing the life of the Soviet Army during World War II do not differ materially from those in force in the armies of other nations since the Armed Forces of each country have in common - regardless of their respective political orders - the same Fundamental obligations related to military function, namely loyalty to the Homeland, according to an undertaking devoted to the oath, the strict observance of the duties of subordination, which involves the submission of each grade to the higher grade, the duty of command and the duty of Obedience exercised at the various levels of the hierarchy in the common interest of the service.

*The order of battle* of the Soviet Army envisages the existence of regular Major Units and territorial Major Units. The first, organically complete, are composed of, as well as permanent, national recruiting staff. The second is usually made up of only framework that in certain periods of the year receive, organizing and training of the staff members to a special reduced rotation.

The military obligation is general and personal, from 19 to 50 years of age, and is for a minimum of two years (for the Army) for a maximum of five years (for the Navy). The entire levy contingent receives pre-military instruction.

With regard to the units at the beginning of the conflict, there is no safe news given the traditional secrecy of the Russians on their military issues. The order of battle of the Soviet Army of the pre-war, according to the Information Service of the Italian Army, was however the following: Army Corps 50 - 55, with 2, 3 or 4 Divisions; Infantry Divisions from 170 to 200, all ternary; Armored corps 9 with 2, 3 or 4 armored divisions; Cavalry Divisions 32, with 2 Cavalry Brigades; Armored Brigades 50,

with 3 tank battalion; 13 Paratrooper Battalions (Increase to 18); Air mobile infantry divisions 1.

In *Annex I*, this of chapter (page 55) shows the details of the organic formations of some regiments and of some of the major units (1941), according to the Army Information Service data.

In November 1942, when the Soviets went to the counter-offensive and began a series of major operations whose outcome marked the reversal of the war in their favor, the strength of the Red Army was as follows (1):

Combatants in the Red Army.....	n. 6,124,000
Artillery (excluding multiple rocket launchers and 50 mm mortars).....	“ 77,734
Tanks and self-propelled. ....	” 6,956
Combat aircraft.....	” 3,254
In the "Fronts" there were	
Divisions:.....	” 391
Rifle Rifles, Armored Brigades and Self-mechanized .....	“ 247
Armored and mechanized Corps.....	” 15
In the strategic reserve there were:	
Divisions.....	” 25
Autonomous Rifle and Armored Brigades.....	” 7
Armored and mechanized Corps. ....	“ 13

The Soviets divide military art into three parts: strategy, operational art, and tactics. On these bases, they encode their *military doctrine*, here some fundamental principles of those adopted during World War II are reported here (2).

Between the two traditional branches of military science, that is, the strategy that deals with the conduct of war in all aspects (and not just the military one) and the *tactics* that concern only combat, the Soviets insert *operational art*, That is to say, “the theory and practice of organizing and conducting operations of a "Front" (Army Group) or of an Army”.

According to the Soviets, modern war requires that all the resources of the nation, material and morals, be mobilized. Of course the

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(1) According to data obtained from the IVOVSS.

(2) Bibliography: IVOVSS; RAYMOND L. GARTHOFF: "Soviet Military Doctrine", Washington, DC, 1952.

conduct of the war can not, in this situation, be the exclusive task of military organs. The general nature of the war has led to a closer merger of the political, military and economic activities. This kind of direction can only be achieved positively if those activities are centered in the hands of supreme political power, capable of organizing and using all the country's energy for the conduct of the war.

Soviet military regulation states that "*offensive combat* is the fundamental aspect of Red Army operations." Total war, according to the Soviets, both offensive and defensive, aims to defeat the enemy, but only an overwhelming offensive launched with an overwhelming superiority of forces and means in the main direction and carried forward by an implacable pursuit can lead to total annihilation of the forces and means of the enemy.

The strategic offensive is therefore the fundamental operating method of the USSR Armed Forces; it is usually carried out by means of some large operations carried out by groups of "Fronts". During the last war, the Soviets launched important offenses articulated on two or three strategic operations, both contemporary and successive. Strategic operations by the Soviets were of different types; the most frequent were the actions of encircling large numbers of enemy forces. The encirclement was carried out by means of concerted convergence, through the simultaneous breaking of the front and the subsequent development of the deep and downstream efforts of the main share of enemy forces; or combined, frontal, and enveloping efforts, in order to divert the enemy forces to areas that are difficult to navigate or to the sea.

Preparations for the offensive planning in which Frontiers are committed are usually about two months of activity in the General Staffs. After that, the meeting of the attacking units is held, which usually takes 50 to 60 kilometers to the ground of the bases of departure, to be transported to the front just before the start of the operation.

In the offensive four phases are planned: preparation, assault, consolidation of the offense, exploitation of success.

The length of preparation is half an hour to six hours. It is framed by the "artillery offensive" which, however, is not present only in the preparation phase, where it takes decisive importance, but at all stages of the operation, by shifting the fire in adherence

to the Infantry and tank advance. Also in the "air offensive" the aviation intervenes on targets beyond the reach of the cannons and moves their bombing forward to the extent that it moves the artillery.

For the assault, always carried out by infantry in co-operation with the tanks, the Soviets use to concentrate the greatest number of forces to make the decisive blow in the direction considered to be most valid, by massive blow. In the case of stubborn resistance, the positions are moved to successive waves to consolidate the success of the first wave.

During the consolidation phase, the counterattack of the opponent is rejected, they are occupied by important defense points, always aiming at systematically destroying the remains of the enemy.

It exploits the success by keeping the offensive action active and operating on all the depths of the opposing deployment, which must always be pursued, encircled and destroyed.

The attack area of a Soviet Army Infantry Division normally ranges from 1.5 to a mile, while the Soviet (pre-war) rule of the strength of the force of the attacker must be four to six times higher than the enemy.

Until 1942, the combat order includes the "shock group" assigned to attack on the main axis and the "pinning group" that forces the enemy with assault units in a secondary direction to prevent him from concentrating his efforts against the shock group. In the Division, the shock group includes two-thirds or three-quarters of infantry units (no less than two infantry regiments), while the pinning group generally does not include more than one regiment. This division of the combat order is modified during the war in 1942. The new "Infantry Combat Rules" adopted in that year states that "the design of the shock groups and pinning groups as it was from the previous Regulation led to the inactivity of pinning units in the battle. The new Regulation therefore deletes the subdivision into impact units and pinning units and forces the concentration of forces, firepower and other means of war all in the main direction, with minimum of forces in the secondary directions "(3).

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(3) This new conception of the fighting order in the attack, the Russians will apply it in December 1942 in the "Little Saturn" operation against the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army (see chapter XV).

The same new regulation of 1942 abolishes deployment in depth in the combat position by the platoon to the Division included. This regulation, on the other hand, requires the implementation of a fundamental and indispensable requirement, namely the simultaneous participation in the combat of all divisional strength and their fire power from the beginning until the end of the battle.

This does not exclude the formation of echelons, especially at the Corps and Army level, in which the second and third echelons are used (generally consisting of motorized divisions, supported by artillery and aviation).

While prescribing that only offensive combat can lead to annihilation of the enemy, Soviet rule (1942) (infantry regulations) considers defense as one of the forms of modern warfare (4) to which it can be resorted to Economize forces in favor of offensive operations on other fronts in order to gain time to concentrate the forces needed to offensive to keep certain important areas in disorganization before the attack. Soviet doctrine prescribes, in each field regulation, that it is necessary to move as soon as possible to the counter-offensive.

The "Field Regulation of 1940" provides two forms of defense: a rigid and a mobile.

Sturdy defense aims to keep ground with a tough resistance always accompanied by counterattacks.

Mobile defense takes place in order to gain time, weaken the enemy, preserve its forces even by losing ground.

The defensive organization adopted by the Russians in World War II is not substantially different from that in other armies, albeit with a different denomination of the various aspects of the organization itself. Thus, for example, a defensive arm is normally organized in two zones, one of the outposts and one in defense, in which a main defensive zone and one or more secondary defense zones are fixed in relation to the sensitivity of the positions to be defended.

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(4) Even before 1942, of course, there existed a Soviet doctrine on the defensive but was not attributed to it too much so that the Army training programs were basically based on the offensive.

The outposts have a depth of about 20 - 25 km in front of the main position with the function of delaying the progression of the opponent with artillery contrasts, aviation and minefield. Instead, it is up to the main defense zone (about one and a half miles deep) to stop the enemy. It is characterized by isolated fortified points that fire the entire area, and by a robust anti-tank defense. There are numerous fallback positions in the main zone as well as in the secondary areas. Armored units are always deployed to counterattack possible enemy penetrations.

Soviet military doctrine involves the existence of *strategic reserves* in the hands of the Supreme Command, Army Group Command and Army Commands; of *operational reserves* available to the Army Corps Command; of *tactical reserves* in Division and Lesser Unit Commands.

The war rules adopted prescribe that "the reserves have the function of rejecting the enemy's surprise attacks especially on the flanks and junction points of two sectors, supporting the units in combat, and also developing and consolidating the achievements obtained;".

About the *tactical procedures* adopted by the Russians in the reality of the battlefield, a direct testimony is that of the Italian Military Attaché in Bucharest, who closely followed the operations of the Romanian Army against Russian units during the first month of war.

This testimony is contained in a series of notes written on the front line (22 June to 22 July 1941), and then transcribed for the purpose of providing our expeditionary Corps to the eastern front useful news about the opponent that the Italian soldiers were engaging in combat.

It takes particular value for this, so it is published in full in *Appendix 2* to this chapter, p. 58), not just for evaluations and the much data it contains on the Soviet Armed Forces, but also because - after only a month of war when that is, the German Armed Forces that had traveled Europe with wondering victories seemed to be unbeatable nowadays - the Italian Military Attaché in Bucharest expresses deep concern over the imminent collapse of the Red Army, which was foreseen by the German Supreme Command.

In general, for the Soviets the rear-area (“tyl”) do not coincide, as in other military doctrines, with the rear face of the battle area where the country's army is deployed, but with the entire national territory in war time it has to be reorganized on a military basis and placed in service of the front. Which coincides with the above-mentioned fundamental Soviet war principle that, during an armed conflict, all the material and moral resources of the nation must be mobilized.

In a lesser sense, it is up to the chain of combat services located in the immediate rear of the front to make sure that in every “*the rear-area meet the needs of the troops.*”

The rear-area services are placed under the command of a chief of the rear area which coordinates the activity of the chief of staff to whom is headed and to secure the supply of the respective branch.

The logistical priority in supplies is given to ammunition and fuel.

In May 1942, the Command of the West Front sent to “All Army Commanders, Division Commanders and Regiments” employed, a Council Directive containing the “Soviet Doctrinal Principles for the Offensive Action” in which was said among other things:

*“1. - The experience of fighting shows that the success of the attack is possible only on condition: of a careful reconnaissance of enemy defense. An accurate preparation of combat units, a good cooperation between all the arms, an organization that ensures the continuity of command action and logistic flow.*

*“To accurately prepare an attack you must first: know the enemy and his defense system well; Choose exactly the main attack direction and concentrate in secret, in correspondence with it, forces and means; bring the troops on hidden starting points of enemy observation and ensure the surprise of attack; Care in detail the cooperation between infantry, artillery, tanks, aviation and special units; Plan the artillery fire and infantry fire system in a continuous and massive attack; Carefully organize the A/A and A/T defense.*



*"2. - Artillery, mortars and fire of multiple rocket launchers have a decisive importance in attack.*

*"The success of the offensive artillery intervention is possible if the infantry and the tanks attack in turn together with the artillery.*

*"The success of the infantry attack depends in particular on the effective use of the weapons owned by the same infantry.*

*"3. - The attack of defense units and strongpoints is a very complex undertaking that requires, in addition to courage, an excellent preparation of the units ...*

*"4. - Counterattacks of the enemy are usually supported by tanks. Therefore, you must have special care in assigning weapons to A/T defense to deployment in attacking. There must be a constant share of A/T means at the hands of the division and regiment commander.*

*"5 - As soon as the success of our attack looms, the enemy uses his aviation as a countermeasure. This requires that you carefully organize the A/A defense.*

*"6. - ... During the attack, special reconnaissance groups must be detached with the first echelon, infiltrating enemy defenses and gathering information about its defensive system deeply.*

*"Reconnaissance patrols must be detached on the open sides, with the task of detecting the inflow of enemy reserves..*

*"For the purpose of timely transmission of the collected data, these recognition groups must be equipped with radio, telephones and colored signal rockets.*

*"Reconnaissance and artillery aircraft must continually monitor the battlefield, the means of fire, tanks, artillery and detect the influx of enemy reserves. Data collected from aerial reconnaissance shall be transmitted by radio and communicated by means of air drop of messages on observation or command posts.*

*"The General Staff must organize the collection of data collected from various types of reconnaissance, including that of special troops, evaluate them promptly and inform the commander. For ancillary reconnaissance tasks it is always necessary to have in reserve reconnaissance means.*

*"7. The success of the attack largely depends on the surprise. To get it you must first keep secret*

*the whole preparation of the attack, conceal your own intentions and mislead the opponent.*

*“8. - If in the enemy defense are permanent fortifications, in order not to suffer significant losses in an attempt to conquer them, 1 to 2 assault teams must be used for each rifle battalion attacking in the first echelon.*

*“Each assault team consists of:*

*A) a unit for the destruction of the barbed wire and the clearance of the openings. A special unit is required for each gap;*

*B) a unit of coverage. On the assault team it is good to have 2 to 3 of these units, each on 2 to 3 men armed with automatic arms or machine guns;*

*C) a unit for the destruction of defensive fortifications.*

*“Each assault team is supported or reinforced by 2 - 3 tanks and 1 - 2 A/T pieces.*

*“Despite the decisive importance of artillery, the infantry must try to make the way with the fire of mortars, machine guns and rifles by eliminating efficient fire and resistance centers.*

*“Usually, the infantry fire must be massive; It must be used not only to destroy known targets but also to beat areas where there are likely to be dangerous fire centers for subsequent forward movement.*

*“The command of 120 mortars is centralized in the hands of the commander of the divisional artillery, that of the 82 mm mortars in the hands of regiment commanders. This allows you to have a powerful mortar share and bring focus concentrations on the most important targets. In the development of the breaking phase, the division commander may pass a part of the 120 mortars to the regiment commanders, while the latter may in turn decentralize part of the 82 mm mortars to the dependant battalion commander.*

*“In the use of tanks, it is necessary:*

*1) Use them on the principle thrust. The armored attack must be truncated and massive;*

*2) It is strictly forbidden to launch the tanks against defenses without first having carefully identified the incoming frontline routes and without checking that there are no A/T obstacles. In order to identify the terrain and its trailability, light T-60 and T-26 tanks must be used for the presence of mined fields. For deep reconnaissance,*

*for the control of the presence of enemy A/T artillery, T-34 and KV tanks must be used;*

*3) The tank attack must be accompanied throughout its depth by aviation and artillery. Before the attack begins, the enemy's A/T defense must be neutralized. Everything that is revealed during the attack has to be destroyed by accompanying guns, artillery, multiple rockets, mortars, machine guns and aviation.*

*"The disposition of tanks should be stacked deep. The first echelon is usually made of heavy wagons. The main task of this echelon is to neutralize the A/T defense left and to upset the enemy fire system.*

*"The second echelon is made of medium tanks. It attacks directly behind the first echelon. Completes the neutralization and annihilation of the A/T defense, eliminates fire centers and enemy infantry.*

*"The third echelon consists of light tanks. It follows the second echelon and has the infantry behind it, continuing the action of neutralization and annihilation.*

*"The armored reserve is in the hands of the commander who organizes the attack on the main line.*

*"The first echelon attack the front margin when the infantry is ready for the attack, while the artillery ultimately carries the fire from the front margin to the most rearward defenses.*

*"In the event that the front margin of defense is beyond the insurmountable A/T obstacles and great natural obstacles. The tank attack after the infantry, in cooperation with artillery and aviation, forced the front margin and allowed the tanks to overcome the A/T obstacle.*

*"Some issues related to the conduct of the attack combat.*

*"Artillery, after neutralizing the targets found on the front margin and on the positions behind, on the signal of the division commander, made some false shooting transport toward the rear. At the time of the last return of fire from the edge to the front margin, the first tanks echelon starts moving from the starting positions.*

*"The final elongation of the shot must coincide with the achievement of the anterior margin by the first echelon of tanks,*

*"The second echelon of tanks goes beyond that as the infantry battalions attacking dispositions behind them. Infantry begins*

*the movement for the attack behind the second echelon of tanks.*

*"The third echelon of tanks overtakes the infantry right in front of the front margin of the enemy defense.*

*"The first echelon of the rifle regiments, without staying on the front margin, continue moving forward. Regiment commanders must try to make the second echelon. Without delay, move to the front edge. They come into combat in the following cases: when the exhaustion of the action in front of the echelon is prolonged; If the resistance of the enemy is stiffened and the first echelon can not fulfill the task alone; For the exploitation of success on the flanks; to defeat the enemy counterattack.*

*"War experience shows that the enemy organizes counterattack on the first successes of the attacking troops. So the consolidation of success and defensive organization on the goals won is of decisive importance ...*

*"As reconnaissance ascertains the threat of counterattack, artillery and mortars make massive fire operations on counterattack troops. The engineers immediately create infantry and A/T obstacles. The infantry, in charge of countering the counterattack, occupies the closest and most favorable position and intervenes with the massive fire of all weapons.*

*"The enemy reports heavy losses with multiple rocket launchers, especially if their focus is concentrated."*

APPENDIX 1

ORGANIC FORMATIONS

*Infantry regiment.*

Command:

1 sec. Anti-tank with 3 cannons of 45 mm.

1 Bn. accompanying with 6 pieces of 76.2 mm.

pl. Air defense with 3 antiaircraft machine guns.

3 co. inf. of 3 pl. of 3 sq. (Total of co: 9 sq. with 1

3 Bn. with } inf. mtr. each and 1 sq. mtr. with 2 weapons);

su } 1 cp. mtr. with 3 pl. of 4 weapons each;

1 sec. Anti-tank of bn. with 2 anti-tank guns

1 bn. motar with 3 co. mortar } 24 50 mm mortars  
24 82 mm mortars.

*Divisional Reconnaissance Battalion.*

Command:

1 sqd. cav. (3 pls with 3 sqd.).

1 co. armored car (3 pl: total 9 light armored car and 3 heavy).

1 co. light tanks (3 pl. light tanks T27A and amphibians).

1 co. inf. truck carried.

1 bty. 76.2 mm autocannons.

1 sec. mtr. c/a truck carried.

1 links unit.

*Cavalry Regiment.*

Command:

1 pl. connections.

4 sqd. Sabers (2 pls of 3 sq. each with 1 inf. Mtr.).

1 sqd. MG. (4 pl each 4 sq. each with the MG).

*Divisional artillery (before the conflict).*

First regiment:

1 gr. with 3 bty. Cannons 76 mm mod. 37.

2 gr. with 1 bty. Cannons 76 mm mod. 37 and 2 bty. 122 mm. howitzers

2,100 men and 1,400 horses.

Second Regiment:

1 gr. with 3 bty. 122 mm. howitzers

1 gr. with 3 bty. 152 mm howitzers.

1,500 men and 600 horses.

Currently the Divisions have only one Regt. Artillery with 2 groups.

1 groups 152 mm howitzers were centralized to the Army or the command of the Supreme Command.

*Corps Artillery Regiment. (Before the conflict).*

Command:

3 gr. with 3 bty. (Normally horse drawn - in course of motorization).

Material:

- 107 mm cannon;

- 152 mm howitzers Mod. 1914

Currently the Corps Regt. have been dissolved and the groups, gathered in maneuvering groups, have been centralized to depend on the Supreme Command.

*War formation and Armament of the Infantry Division*  
(War Organics)

Infantry		Cav.	Artillery		Machine Gun			Mortars			Art. of Regt and of Bn.		Artillery (pieces)		
Regt	Bn	Squad	Regt	Gr	Lt or SMG	Hvy	A/A	50	82	120	perf	a.c	Sm	Med	A/A
3	12	1	2	5	243	162	33	72	72	18	18	36	20	49	6

ORGANIC CONSTITUTION OF SOME MAJOR UNITS

*Infantry Division.*

3 Inf. Regt.

1 Regt. art. div.

1 Bn. reconnaissance.

1 Bn. artisans.

1 Bn. transmissions.

1 co. A/A MG

1 co. chemistry.

1 Bn. 120 mm mortar.

1 anti-tank unit.

*Cavalry Division.*

2 Brigades Cav. (Each with 2 Regt cav.).

1 Regt. motorized infantry.

1 Regt. Artillery with 4 groups.

1 Bn. Tanks with 4 squadrons (32 tanks).

1 co. anti-tank - engineer unit - services.

Some Divisions are with 3 Regt. cav., 1 Regt. artillery and some armored and anti-tank units.

*Armored Brigade.*

Command:

2 Bn. light tanks (Bn with 3 cp. with 3 pl.)	total tanks	64
1 Bn. tanks:		
with 2 co. Medium tanks	total Medium tanks	22
and 1 co. heavy Medium	total heavy tanks	<u>7</u>
	Total tanks	93

The anti-aircraft group (3 bty with 12 pieces and 1 co A/A MG with 6 - 12.7 mm weapons).

1 Bn. motorized Inf.	} su	3 co. machine gunners;
		1 co. mortars with 12 weapons;
		1 co. anti-tank with 8 pieces;
		1 co. tank hunters with 16 flamethrowers
1 co. recon (8 medium and 7 light armored cars).		
transmissions unit, repairs, services.		

APPENDIX 2.

AFTER A MONTH OF WAR AT THE ROMANIAN FRONT

*Notes by Col. Corrado Valfré di Bonzo, Military Attaché in Bucharest on Soviet tactical procedures*

**PREMISE.**

I summarize my personal observations and those collected at the Headquarters during this first month of war:

- I say that it is fragmentary notes;
- which refer *exclusively to the Romanian front* (at which, except for a Romanian motorized mechanized division, only infantry, mountain and cavalry units have been operated);
- which essentially concern the narrow tactical field;
- which does not mean that the rush and unorganized collection of those news that may be of any use to our expeditionary corps.

**MORAL OF THE TROOPS AND THE FORMATIONS.**

As regards discipline, driven, cohesion, that is to say moral, there is no doubt that the behavior of Soviet troops and cadres was a surprise to those who, deceived by a propaganda that is not my judgment, besides To swear that the Soviet regime would collapse to the first push, were persuaded of the inability of troops and red army officers.

I refer to what I wrote in Moscow in 1939 in a monograph titled "At the forefront: the colossus from the clay head".

Of Soviet youth - and U.S.S.R. can arm over a dozen millions of men - what Stalin has thrown in the first rank, in this gigantic battle, represents the flower, and for prestige and trust.

And the Soviet youth who for 20 years absorbs the communist verb through a pounding intelligent propaganda because he does not know what happens beyond the boundaries of U.S.S.R. and therefore can not find terms of comparison outside of his past in which the material and essentially moral living conditions of the working and peasant mass were inferior to those created by the Stalinist regime, it is for Stalin.

Destroyed the altars, old icons have replaced the dictator's effigy, the old liturgies communist beliefs. In the name of which he is now beaten and dies. For this ideal dies and for the homeland: for Stalin, realizing as much as the new dogmas could be abstruse for the great mass, for a few years he has joined and I almost melted the ideal of the homeland, whose boundaries and the same conception had been ideally abolished by the third international.



The troop is therefore beaten and still battles on the ground and in the sky honorably. Overwhelmed and overcome resistance centers continue to struggle until the last man, until the last cartridge: with fanaticism. Frequent suicides to escape imprisonment.

There have been instances - as far as they are concerned - of casemates in which defenders were locked up from outside, of works in which the political commissars who imposed the fight to death were shot.

I did not mind the veracity of this affirmation. However, it would be unwise for my subordinate opinion to take too easy the illusions from these sporadic episodes. It is true that today, on the Romanian front, only those units - elements not units - have been released - the quick timing of German maneuver had left no other way of escape.

Despite the overwhelming superiority of German fighters, which, together with the D.C.A. systematically drops half or 3/4 of the attacking formations, the Soviet aviators continue to throw themselves in such conditions where the chances of being able to return are practically non-existent.

## COMMANDS.

Although the unexpected start of hostilities has completely surprised the Soviet command - (Chisinau, Cernauti, Kiew, Nikolajew and Odessa fully illuminated during the first night of war are proving it) - you can not fail to recognize that the reaction of the various commands is was ready and effective.

The German-Romanian troop attacks have met, where they had been decided to leave the country, serious obstacles to the advancement in the skillful, elastic, mobilizing and obstinate pre-engineered and armored retrogrades operating in retreat with probe strokes on the front and more frequently on the flanks. Awe-inspiring resistance where you did not have to give a step: in the tight tactical field repeated, effective counterattacks, coming from different directions often unexpectedly conducted with expertise and daring. In the wider framework of groups of large units of motorized masses working harmoniously in time and space and in the most appropriate and profitable directions.

In the first phase of the battle that runs from 22 June to 15 July, the Soviet command managed to neatly clear Bucovina and Northern Bessarabs, losses and inflicting on the attacker. Poor number of prisoners - (from which of course the Bessarabians who are in the masses must be excluded from the Soviets and the Anelants, and then to join the homeland). Virtually zero the booty of war. In the second phase of the great battle begun at dawn on July 16, and still in full but contradictory development (which led to the breakthrough of the Stalin line between Moghilew and Jampol and the reconquest of all Bessarabia), the Soviet command operated with method, energy, and above all calmly: to Dniester resistance to repeated counterattacks to contain and reduce bridgeheads, they followed the counterattacks on the sides of the columns now in full swing to the Bug, despite the ever closer threat of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army and the German 1<sup>st</sup> Armored pushing to the southeast.

The retreat maneuver was very effective that allowed the Soviet units in the ongoing struggle to escape from encirclement that seemed inevitable.

The commander and unit commands then have this front and so far has worked and worked well. Truly those of the Corps and the smaller units.

The recent appearance of political commissioners whose authority seems to be taking ever greater proportions - certainly higher than those of the past - and whose number seems to be increasing, however, has returned fortunately to be a disintegration element that almost destroys the unity of Command, because it dampens the sense of responsibility - dividing it and, above all, fearing - which creates an atmosphere of suspicion and hatred, a heavy grip of superstructures and pre-empirical interference with action.

The information service, despite the slight difficulties, worked relatively well. The General Headquarters, despite its multiple movements, has always been bombed; The most important counterattacks have been sparked against those Romanian units which, in order to be mobilized, have less cohesion than others.

Transport, in spite of the poor conditions of the roads, worsened by the persistence of rains and the solemn action of the Stukas, fulfilled their task, both in the first phase of the war in which the exodus of troops and material from Bucovina and Bessarabia was carried out neatly and in totality; Both in the second, characterized by the mobility of the masses operating in counter-offensive and retreat actions.

#### TACTICAL USE OF VARIOUS ARMS.

##### *Infantry.*

In addition to the moral qualities of which I have said generically, the Soviet infantry has proven to have excellent training and practice. The game of minute tactics is precise enough to give the impression of being instinctive.

The maneuver is not neglected even in the smaller units, trained to exploit the surprise, to seek out the enemy's side and the rear, to exploit the terrain, the masking, the fire, the discipline of which is excellent and whose effects are have been remarkable now.

Infantry tactics feature is extreme mobility: starting with the company where automatic weapons, making the first profitable bursts, immediately change position to escape the reaction of the opponent, the team, and within the same team, the single shooter, to the bodies, to the units, which constantly use the motorized means to maneuver.

The units located in masked organizations open the fire at a short distance to take full advantage of the surprise; In free ground, when the masking allows, also allow the opposing formations to approach the effects of the fire on command.

The infantry defends the resistance centers fiercely, even though these have been surpassed. He often creates a vacuum before the attacking units front.

As soon as the formations went deeper, the units that had cleared and moved to lateral positions triggered violent counterattacks that often yielded concrete results.

He is trained to target the uniforms that stand out in the crowd. There are groups of shooters equipped with a rifle scope specially designed for this task. That is why it is *imperative for the officer to camouflage as much as possible with the troop*.

The Soviet infantry wields a lot of ambushes and tricks: it is necessary to be wary of white flags that almost always hide a trap; of the fake dead who rise to open the fire behind; be cautious about crossing seemingly unpaved woodland. It was the case of advanced battalions in woods where there was no trace of enemy, taken from the fire by whole units silently falling from their hiding places among the fronds or made a full fire target of selected shooters perched on the trees with automatic weapons. Frequently also the exploitation of uniforms taken from prisoners or injured to take hand shots or to perform informative tasks.

Connections with artillery, secured by wire and radio, have proved to be good so far: so harmonious the use of the two weapons was essentially in the *small field of the smaller units*.

It is abundant with the accompanying artillery, widely exploited even at the shortest distances. Effective against the Romanian material the anti-tank shot.

No ammunition economy, both portable and heavy weapons.

Larger cartridges used were deformable and extensively explosive.

There are also only explosive charged cartridges that - as the prisoners say - should be used to wipe the wound at the very moment when the bayonet came into play. Excellent equipment and armament. Wide range of automatic weapons, of rifles equipped with telescope, curved shooting weapons, hand grenades.

### *Artillery.*

The main features of Soviet artillery and its use are the following. Irrational use of fire: diluted, never or nearly bulk. The most frequent shot and I would say normal is that done for battery, rarely by group. Frequently that of the section and the piece is isolated, which implies the existence of a wide and illogical decentralization. Ignorance or ignorance of the fire maneuver has, at least, reduced the shooting results. The only example of concentration - if this can be defined as the convergence of the shooting of a divisional regiment - was in correspondence with a Romanian bridgehead on Pruth. Utilization of the maximum as the lowest outgrowth. Similar to what the infantry does with automatic weapons, division artillery and armed forces to avoid counter-charge shooting, it often changes position: within the group, the battery, and even in the section.

The shooting was generally quite accurate, though - perhaps because of the lack of control of the sky - Soviet units are not served exceptionally that of the assistance of the aircraft to direct it.

The most effective competition from aviation to artillery is for now that provided by fighter aircraft for the anti-aircraft batteries. When an enemy formation is spotted, some fighters, naturally holding a distance, flying at its own altitude and in the same direction, communicate speed, speed and height to defense. This system has yielded good results.

Army Corps artillery is preferably used for enfilade fire.

Army material, if it made precise and effective shots in the first phase of the campaign - even though it was able to take advantage of a detailed preparation - in the aftermath of the operations, it has obtained mediocre results, perhaps because of lack of air aid.

Just as the various organs of the defense fought, it was the artillery of this specialty. The most effective shot was the material of 47 mm. from 500 to 4,000 meters. Alert personnel, ready and well-trained: quick action, great shooting speed.

The defense meshes, wide on the lines, protrude inside at the sensitive points. The advanced batteries rarely come into action: they prefer to focus on formations that, after having been subjected to the most rechargeable batteries, have started their way back.

The mainly used shooting method is that of fire curtain barriers, made with plenty - I would say almost waste - of ammunition. Large is the use of tracer bullets.

Very high in bullets of all specialties and all gauges the percentage of unexploded shots. To date, they have not been used by artillery projectiles with special liquids.

Bear in mind that the Soviets often dispatch ammunition to tanks with wagons or farm trucks apparently loaded with hay. Attacked by air formations, more than once similar columns have reacted by opening up a fiery fire of machine guns.

### *Tanks and armored cars,*

On the Romanian front, only small and medium tonnage tanks were used: from 7 to 20 tons. Their use, always rational and timely, was - except for exceptional cases - the classic one, that is to say mass (masses however not comparable to German ones).

The tank officers have shown boldness and excellent maneuvering qualities. The preferred maneuver is the one that searches the enemy's flank.

During the first period of the ongoing campaign, some Romanian bridgeheads were attacked and destroyed only by armored units. The great counterattacks in central Bessarabia were all preceded by massive formations, which, combined with numerous armored vehicles, maneuvering with efficiency, mobility and elasticity, cleverly absorbed the uncomplicated task of cover the retreat beyond the Dniester.

The Stukas have proven to be the most effective means to eradicate them. It's good to keep in mind, however, that even under the scary bombing of these hissing planes, the formations have not dispersed, but have continued, although decimated, towards their goal.

Bullets from 37 and 47 easily pierced the armor and turrets. Great evidence has given incendiary bullets.

In an experimental shot made at Stefanesti against a captured mid-ton tank, a special rifle bullet easily pierced the side armor.

The marshland is fatal for the Soviet tank. I have had a field of observation several - light - immobilized, although not sunk more than one span, in marshy soils that other tanks in similar conditions could easily have disengaged.

The Soviet armored material can not even stand a long way compared to the German one in terms of resistance, maneuverability and offensive abilities.

The Soviet tanks are marked by a white band, about 1/2 meter wide, painted on the top in the direction of length.

Like ammunition columns, armored units make widespread use of straw or fodder canopies to avoid visibility from above.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE TERRITORY.

The organization of the ground was effective where there were pre-organized systems - such as along the Dniester - both as the efficiency of the individual casemates as well as their location for shooting and staggering in depth,, as well as tracing of barbed-wire, anti-tank preparations, etc.

Defensive lines were found the presence of painted, non-existent, mischief-molded artwork to attract artillery and airplane shooting and allow real-world, well-masked works to take full advantage of the effects of fire and surprise.

Field works proved to be poorly efficient. But the rains that produced mudslides, landslides and floods contributed to make them such.

In the expeditious organization of the terrain, infantry does not generally dig trenches, but deep holes punctuated on a chessboard: for single shooter and for automatic weapons.

Of minefields, have not met many today: all of them in the case of pre-organized defensive bands along the Pruth, Danube and Dniester. Soviet engineers usually choose the soils in the immediate vicinity of the watercourses: precisely those stretches where it is foreseeable either fording or bridge casting.

It does not seem to be that the withdrawing Red Army set up minefields; however, it is likely that others will meet along the Bug and along the Dniester.

The presence of clocked and percussion bombs was found in one of the few munitions or food depots that were abandoned.

## AVIATION.

Generalizing it can be said that the use of aviation was neither organic nor rational: since the early days of the campaign, when the Soviet command, in spite of the slaughter of the first surprise attack and of the later ones, still had a mass at least triple of what remained effective today.

The red aviation has demonstrated that it does not have a doctrine of war; The high command as well as those of the great units, were absolutely impartial to their task.

I employed piecemeal, lacking actions of genius and effectiveness, often of logic. Rare actions that have achieved concrete results. Few relatively nocturnal actions - which is to demonstrate the poor level of staff education and its hasty technical preparation. Arduousness and often fearfulness by crews (almost always made up of heterogeneous elements). Their tactical qualities are modest. Mediocre in fire and maneuver: both to escape the fighter attacks and to the action of the D.C.A.

Conversely, all the possible gimmicks and tricks to deceive the adversary: from the choice of the longest and most tortuous routes to reach the goal from unexpected directions, to the most vulgar mystifications.

Often the case of Soviet aircraft that, using the resemblance of the shape with some similar colored opponents with the same paint and marked by the German or Romanian marks, has been able to achieve the objectives by deceiving the defense. (The most profitable action on the oil field was done under these conditions).

By exploiting the same unfair makeup, fighter formations could approach allied formations and gain some initial success.

Much used in Soviet aviation is also a special two-tone mimic dye and irregular designs of aircraft that recalls the one used by ships.

### a) *Reconnaissance.*

Reconnaissance, which does not have a fast and long-range type of aircraft, is carried out either by old low-speed bombers operating at large isolated levels or in small formations sometimes throwing small gauge and cluster bombs, or more frequently from the same bombing squadrons.

Soviet reconnaissance, apart from the radio, makes extensive use of rockets and smokes. The ground units correspond to reports with white sheets.

### b) *Bombardment.*

Bombardment actions are generally carried out from large heights and against vast surface targets. The shot was almost always dispersed and inaccurate. Formations prefer - not to say systematically - from unexpected and always different directions to surprise D.C.A.

Never, as I said, mass actions. The incursions are carried out at successive waves and distanced by formations of 3 to 5 or at most 7 aircraft.

On this front the bombs used - (of which very remarkable is the percentage of unexploded ones) - have never exceeded 250 kg: both disruptive and incendiary ones. Of the first, effective, the useful range of action is around 150 m, while the yield is poor.

Attacked, Soviet bombers defend themselves with regular boarding gear, with firecrackers exploding 100 m after launch and have proven to be quite effective. Often, unload the bombs, the devices fall down to operate with a machine gun against the columns in motion.

The effects of Soviet bombing were generally scarce when the actions took place during the day, almost nil during night raids.

D.C.A. and the fighters always opened wide breaches in attacking formations: more than once it has been the case that even a aircraft could not return to its base.

### *c) Fighters and Assault.*

Soviet fighter is (and perhaps it should be said to be) very vigilant, given the quick and timely reports of listening places.

It preferably uses 3 - 5 airplanes forming a surprise attack on isolated units or enemy formations that, following the shooting of defense, have lost their compactness.

Never attacks bombardment or reconnaissance formations when they are escorted. (The best way to escape fighters is therefore to be escorted and to maintain above all the compactness of formation). Attacks preferably behind or below, opening the focus to medium and small distances.

Attacks are usually individual: exceptionally, the action of more fighters pursues the same target. Failed the attack of the first, it goes immediately in the field the second and then the third. While the action of the first aircraft is in progress, the other of the same or other formations, meanwhile, are rumbling around the attached aircraft to intercept their escape.

Rarely - except in case of absolute necessity - at winning the aircraft renew the attack. The fighter escapes almost always combat, even if the duel is single.

Often, the target misses, the pilot simulates escape: to resume and retry the attack. In the fighting where many units come into play, generally some Soviet aircraft evolve to attract the opponent: to give fighters who fly at higher altitudes to surprise.

Soviet fighters makes extensive use of tracer bullets.

Often in assault actions, pilots have proved more than temperamental, unconscious.

On this front they have made numerous companies devoted to the sure catastrophe going down isolated to less than 50 m to machine guns on the

Field, infantry, artillery stations while the allied fighters had already started its action.

But even in this tactical field in which undeniably more active Soviet aviation appeared, never rational actions, successive waves, but sporadic actions - often heroic but almost always empty.

The disastrous effects of the bold, precise and pounding action of Stukas and D.C.A. are made day by day more obvious. The potential of Soviet air force, in all its specialties, decreases with geometric progression.

In these days, for example, where the crisis of the Dniester passage is still in progress and consequently, on the one and the other side, long columns thicken, Soviet air action has been virtually nothing. And fighters are getting less and less active.

The use of paratroopers - the Soviet national sport - was a bad surprise. Despite the rational examples of rational use provided by Germany, despite the huge number of paratroopers available to the USSR, up to now, on this front, this specialty has also been used to spy and essentially for sabotage and information. Generally, parachute launches belong to the regions in which they are to operate.

As far as Romania is concerned, however, it can be said that, despite the help of some Jewish elements, there are very few paratroopers who have been able to escape capture, and this is also the watchful and generous collaboration of the civilian population. However it is not excessive measure of prudence to keep watch on ammunition depots, fuel and airfields.

## CONCLUSION.

(If ever conclusions can be drawn when a battle - the most gigantic that history remembers - is still in full swing).

The essential points established in this first month of *campaign on the Romanian front* (I repeat: exclusively on the Romanian front) are the following:

- the action of the Soviet command and the command of great units was more agile and rational than was foreseen;
- the commanding officers of the smaller units have shown that they have excellent tactical and ascendant upkeep on their employees;
- experience in Finland has been widely and intelligently exploited;
- the behavior of cadres and troops has been up to today despite the ongoing series of lost battles. Other armies of much greater fame have capitulated in a shorter time and after much less bloody struggles). This does not exclude that, continuing with the same rhythm hammer blows of German armies - to which as soon as possible those of our magnificent Expeditionary Corps in Russia - collapse may occur. The imminence of this collapse, however, the two years spent in Moscow cause me to be somewhat skeptical;



- The use of the motorization, made on a very large scale, has been rational: it has allowed rapid maneuvering of masses and retreating often carried out under particularly difficult conditions;

- if the aviation and the artillery - except for the counter-aircraft - were irrationally employed, infantry and armored units knew, in the most desperate situations, rationally maneuvering.

The Soviet army then fights and knows how to fight, Stalin's youth dies.

On the eve of the entry into action of our troops, which once again join the German forces, struggling heroically for an ideal of justice, will be able to win this bitter and gigantic battle, rejoin my mind a question that more than once Romanians officers - (which I know better than I know how many lives have already cost them this campaign) - after having spotted the vivid headlines of certain newspapers, they asked me: " But why do we continue to depict the Soviet army as an army of inept, unable to fight, longing only to flee, to the counter-revolution, when here to fight, to win, you do die?".

General Headquarters, July 22, 1941.

The Royal Military Attaché

Colonel CORRADO V ALFRÉ DI BONZO



## SECOND PART

### OPERATIONS OF THE CSIR

## CHAPTER IV

### CONSTITUTION, TRANSFER AND MUSTER OF THE ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY CORPS IN RUSSIA (CSIR)

#### 1. – CONSTITUTION

The establishment of a Expeditionary Corps, which represented Italy in the war undertaken by Germany against the Soviet Union, had progressed step by step in the weeks before the outbreak of the conflict and corresponded to an ancient intention of Mussolini, Manifested to Hitler until June 2, 1940 (1), repeated in a later time.

In the first enunciation of the intention to intervene militarily with the Germans against the Russians - expressed on 30 May 1941 by the Head of Government and Minister of War, Mussolini, to the Head of the General Staff, Cavallero (*Document No. 7*) - the entity of the Italian presence had been fixed as three Divisions: one motorized, one armored and one infantry, the only one nominated the *Granatieri di Sardegna*. During that interview, General Cavallero did not suggest to Mussolini that Italian intervention would take on greater organicity, and more weight, if the Army Corps commanded three divisions.

Such an opportunity emerged immediately afterwards, in an interview with the Chief of Staff General with his collaborators of the Supreme Command. There was no longer talk of sending individual divisions, but it quickly took on the idea of forming an Expeditionary Corps with self-reliant and rapid divisions, as it was then implemented with the only difference that instead of directing the Command of the Special Army Corps, as is said in

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(1) Hitler and Mussolini, op. Cit., Pagg. 49 and 50.

*Document n. 8*, the Command of the Truck Transportable Corps (2) was appointed.

The "Cavallero Diary" - from which *Documents No. 7 and 8* above - in the report of 15 June 1941, indications of the objectives of the German Army in future operations against the USSR confirms that the measure of Italian intervention at the eastern front is fixed in an Army Corps (*Document No 9*).

On June 17, Army General Staff Subcommittee General Francesco Rossi again referred to General Cavallero the possibility of inserting armored elements into the composition of the Special Army Corps if it had been sent to the Eastern Front (*Document No. 10*).

After two days, the solution was that the Expeditionary Corps would be formed with two "Truck transportable" Divisions and one Celere Division, all three in the Truck transportable Corps (*Documents 11 and 12*).

On the eve of the German attack on the USSR on June 22, 1941, the Italian Grande Unit destined to operate with the German Army was therefore preparing to take over the abovementioned ordinance and General Cavallero referred by telephone to the Head of Government. From the text of that telephone communication, faithfully reported in *Document n. 13*, the following concepts can be found:

That in the composition of the Army Corps intended for the Russian-German front, the Unit(s) were respected, which was not the case;

- that the three denominations used by General Cavallero to indicate to Mussolini the Divisions *Pasubio* and *Torino* - that is to say

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(2) The Command of the Special Army Corps had been constituted in Padua on November 15, 1940, drawing the Commander and very few other elements from the Command of the Celere Corps, and no special features were given to him. It was only a "Command", without Units or Services, which he would have received at the Albanian front, having to work in the 11<sup>th</sup> Army. On July 2, 1941, he was again in Padua, having been repatriated only with a few directly dependent units, devoid of the divisions remaining overseas.

The truck transportable Army Corps, having completed the operations of April 1941 against Yugoslavia, on May 7th returned to the locations of peace and was composed at that time by the truck transportable *Pasubio* and *Piave* Divisions and the *Littorio* Armored Division.

"Truck mounted Division", "Motorized Divisions" and "Truck transportable Divisions" were equivalent terms, which did not correspond to reality as:

The term "self-contained divisions" is a generic term and does not match the organic tables of the Divisions that the Army had at that time. There were no "self-contained" divisions (3);

- *Pasubio* and *Torino* were not motorized divisions as they did not have the means to transport themselves in their own right;
- The same Large Units were "autotransportable" divisions, with the features mentioned in note 3 above, namely that they did not have their own transports;
- That mid-caliber, 105/32 cannons could be qualified as "long-range", while their maximum span was only 14,000 meters (4), limiting those pieces among mid-range artillery.
- During the same day of June 21, other telephone communications between the Chief of General Staff General confirmed

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(3) Divisions mobilized for war were distinguished by:

- *Infantry divisions*: they had baggage trains, carts and very few vehicles; they could be of the *normal type* and of the *mountain type*, and differed among themselves because the mountains would have had the regiment of artillery carried by pack animal or wheeled;
- *Alpine divisions*: they had numerous had baggage trains and artillery carried by pack animal ;
- *Celere divisions*: they were composed of cavalry, bicyclists, horse artillery and mechanical towing, fast tanks;
- *Transportable divisions*: they were like infantry divisions of the normal type, with only combat baggage trains and motorized services. The artillery was mechanical towing; they could move in a truck, but did not have their own truck units for their carriage;
- *Motorized divisions*: they were composed of infantry, bersaglieri and artillery with mechanical towing; had in their possession the vehicles necessary for their transport;
- *Armored divisions*: Incorporated truck mounted bersaglieri, units of tanks and mechanical towed artillery.

(4) These were re-furbished war-booty, rather heavy, unmanageable, difficult to tow on poor roads, and also had technical disadvantages during the shooting. There were in total three groups with 36 pieces.

what had been said in the meeting he had with Mussolini (*Documents No. 14*).

From the reading of the Cavallero Diary of the following days, from 22 to 29 June, we get the clear feeling of the remarkable organic and logistical work done by the central authority to equip the Autotransportable Army Corps of all weapons and all means, not only to ensure the operational efficiency of the Great Unit, but also to make it appear decently in the eyes of the units of the allied armies with which the Italian Corps would compete (*Documents no. 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19*).

On July 9, it was established that the complex of terrestrial and air forces destined to operate at the eastern front assumed the name of "*ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY CORPS IN RUSSIA (CSIR)*". Its detailed organic constitution results from the "order of battle " reported in *Documents no. 20, 21 and 22*.

The following notes appear on the composition of the Corps of Expedition.

The assignment of a Celere Division to the CSIR - consisting of only two divisions called "Autotransportable", but in fact of infantry - gives reason for some considerations.

The structure of the Celere Divisions (5) had been studied organically to entrust the same large units (only three throughout the Army), primarily the task of strategic exploration on an Army's front, on medium mountain terrain or Hilly or adjacent to the alpine area. In that kind of land, and on that road network, the units would have operated with wheeled vehicles, while the most difficult terrain would be overcome by the horse-riding units. Light artillery, for 1/3 horse pulled and 2/3 motorized, could, depending on the need, support "exploratory detachments" in relation to the tasks entrusted to them (6).

Now, the strength of the Divisions of *Pasubio* and *Torino* did not arise with the consistency of an Army not even reduced, so the presence of a Grande Unit for strategic exploration in favor of the two Divisions mentioned seems excessive if compared to tactical - strategic doctrine of that time.

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(5) Composed of a regiment of bersaglieri bikers, two cavalry regiments, a light tank squadron group (3.5 tons), an artillery regiment with six small caliber batteries.

(6) The artillery of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division was however formed by the regiment of horse artillery with 6 batteries.

The other possible use of *Celere* as a mass of shock and maneuver in the hands of the commander of the Corps was, on the other hand, wanting and unsafe, as robust as the Great Unit of armor capable of deciding an action or to restore a compromised situation.

Not only that, but in a land like that of southern Russia, wherever practicable off-road by medium and heavy tanks, the threat of enemy armored vehicles would be constant, thus significantly limiting the profitable use of the *Celere*.

Finally, the speed of movement of the *Celere* Division units to precede the bulk of the Army Corps was not homogeneous and the three motorized Bersaglieri battalions were always destined to detach themselves from the slower ten cavalry squadrons and the artillery.

As far as the two "transportable" infantry divisions are concerned, it is not only that the availability of vehicles, as we have seen, did not allow the transport of one of the two large units, but that availability was also considerably below the extensive contingent necessities for the operations on that front, characterized by rapidity and depth of movement, would inevitably be created.

Another organic variant was the inclusion of a black shirt legion among units directly under the command of the Army Corps. The staff of the Divisions of *Pasubio*, *Torino* and *Celere* as Special Divisions did not include, unlike that of other infantry divisions, units of the Volunteer Military for National Security (MVSN), but the ideological aspect of the war and the need to equip the Army Corps Command of some element to intervene directly in the fight, they determined the variant. The legion was also strengthened with a battalion of accompanying weapons (A 81 mm. mortar company and a 47/32 cannon company), not foreseen in the divisional legions of the militia.

In addition to the two "transportable" divisions, a mortar battalion was assigned for the experience of the Albanian front, so that the possibilities of shooting with a curved trajectory within the Divisions had practically doubled. It had also been doubled, from one to two, the presence of 47/32 anti-tank cannons (7)

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(7) The 47/32 cannon also could carry out accompanying action; Maximum 3.500 meters.



to the Divisions, while an entire battalion of the same 47/32 cannons had been placed under the direct command of the Army Corps Command.

It should also be borne in mind that the assignment of other units, in addition to those provided for in the organic tables, certainly gave the units of CSIR greater operational efficiency, but in order to obtain it, it was necessary to proceed to the divestiture of other mobilized units, even if they were located in National territory, available for other war uses. For example, the V and the XXVI divisional mortar battalions, assigned respectively to the Divisions of *Pasubio* and *Torino*, had been taken away from the *Cosseria* and *Assietta* Divisions, the CIV motorized machine gun battalion, the II Battalion 47/32 anti-battalion and the 1<sup>st</sup> bersaglieri motorcycle Company, All assigned to the Army Corps Command, had been ceded respectively by the IX Army Corps (Bari), II (Alexandria), as well as the *Cosseria* and *Assietta* Divisions for the "Demand O" (possible occupation of the eastern departments of France), which became real in the autumn of 1942.

Anti-tank companies 141<sup>st</sup>, 171<sup>st</sup> and 172<sup>nd</sup>, assigned to the *Pasubio*, *Torino* and 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Divisions, came from Divisions *Centauro* (armored), and 2<sup>nd</sup> *Celere*, the first destined to North Africa, the other two engaged operatively in the Balkans.

For artillery can be said that the CSIR standard equipment was rather poor, as shown in *Document No. 22*. In fact, in the units directly subordinate to the Army Corps there were - in addition to the three 105/32 groups (36 pieces) already mentioned - only two groups of 75/46 bound to the anti-aircraft defense, each with only two batteries, and others two batteries each armed with eight 20 mm cannons, also for anti-aircraft.

The divisional artillery of the divisions, as well as being rather poor, was also outdated. It was in fact two groups (24 pieces) of 100/17 war booty, pre-war Austro-Hungarian of the First World War (maximum shot 9,300 m) and seven groups (72 pieces) of 75/27 cannons (maximum throw 10,240 m) already veterans of the Italian - Turkish War 1911 - 12 and the First World War. Of these last cannons, the three groups of the *Celere* Division were with two horse drawn batteries (24 pieces), that is, with the guns pulled by three pairs, with horse mounted drivers and with all the gunners equally mounted.

Three other features distinguished CSIR from other normal ordered Army Corps:

- a consistent assignment of engineer units (ten specialties), with a considerable amount of Pioneer units;
- the assignment of aeronautics units, with observation and fighter units for a total of 83 aircraft;
- the existence of an Intendenza [Quarter Master], though originally envisaged to carry out limited tasks, and a greater supply of units of the various Services, which logistically assimilated the CSIR to a small Army.

To the notes made here, one can still add the following considerations to the structure of the Expeditionary Corps.

Its structure should have been adapted to the operational tasks that the Italian units were called upon to fulfill in the framework of Directive n. 21 - a code note with the name "Piano Barbarossa" - which the German Supreme Command had imparted to its armies of the eastern front, among which the CSIR was to enter.

The Directive n. 21 presumed that the mass of the Soviet Army should be beaten in a swift campaign, to be completed by autumn 1941, with bold operations "pushing far ahead of armored wedges" and at the same time preventing the traditional maneuver of the enemy to overcome by withdrawal to the immense spaces due to its initial inferiority.

In such a kind of operation, carried out on a land that did not oppose the movement with natural obstacles, with the exception of watercourses, armored and armored cars found ideal conditions for profitable employment; Also for the motorized infantry units, which could be entrusted with the task of widening the breakthrough action of the armor with advanced depths to reach long distance targets.

Mostly, therefore, two were the requirements that would have to determine the structure of CSIR: the first was the adequate availability of armored units; the other that the infantry divisions were fully motorized. To such high demands was added a third less important, that is, a substantial supply of effective cannons for anti-tank action.

But the organic composition of CSIR was not such as to fully meet these requirements.

As for the armored units, the Expeditionary Corps had a available only one group of 3 ton light tanks

(Initially 60 tanks, divided into four squadrons), in charge of the *Celere* Division (8).

The other two Divisions did not have tanks.

Regarding the need to give CSIR more consistent force in relation to the needs that have been said, it should be borne in mind that the three armored divisions existing at the time of the constitution of the CSIR, one the *Ariete*, was in North Africa. The other two, the *Centauro* and *Littorio*, who had just returned from the Balkan front, were in Italy in reorganization to be equally transferred to North Africa.

With regard, then, to the total motorization of the Expeditionary Corps, it has already been said that the supplied vehicles would easily allow the transport of only one Division. The CSIR commander, General Messe, immediately reported the serious deficiency to the Supreme Command, from which he depended, but the situation did not improve due to the unavailability of vehicles.

As it is written in this regard in the Cavalero Diary on July 25, 1941 (*Document No. 23*) That is, "We will soon send in Russia the vehicles still missing for one of the already-formed Divisions", had limited implementation.

The CSIR anti-tank was mainly represented by 92 47/32 cannons in the Large Units A/T companies, increase to 108 with the arrival of the 272<sup>nd</sup> company, A/T cannons of 47/32 (19 February 1942) and then of the Croatian legion (end of March 1942). The 47/32 piece was then the only lightweight cannon built and adopted to carry out pre-eminently anti-tank action. Its effectiveness against armored vehicles placed in the field by the adversary can be overcome by comparing its characteristic data with the armor of the Soviet tanks used in the Second World War, that is, the medium tank T 34. In particular:

- the Italian anti-tank from 47/32 launched shells capable of perforating at a distance of 500 m steel plates of the thickness of 43 mm, with a normal impact, that is, with an angle of incidence of 90°, or steel plates of 32 mm with impact of 60°;
- the Soviet tank T 34, weighing 26 tons, armed with a 76-piece and two machine guns, had a armored

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(8) Due to bad road conditions, in the third decade of August 1941 it was necessary to remove 20 tanks, from which the spare parts were indispensable to ensure the efficiency of the other 40 tanks. As a result, one of the four squadrons that formed the group was dissolved, which remained for three squadrons.

Turret and hull, in the parts most exposed to the opposing shot, of 45 mm.

In order to overcome the shortage of artillery (antiquated and of limited power), a second mortar battalion was assigned to each of the two transportable divisions, in addition to that provided by the organics beyond a battalion company with the accompaniment weapons of the CC.NN *Tagliamento* legion, but these measures could be endured without deficiencies elsewhere in those weapons.

More important, however, was the supplementary equipment of 47/32 Ant-tank cannons. Limited production generally made sense of the scarcity of such weapons, the action of which, however, was not effective against all the enemy medium tanks. Ordinary organic formations provided for a company of 8 pieces per division. The special endowment conferred on the CSIR's Grand Units became more than triple by assigning a battalion to the direct Dependencies of the Army Corps and another company to the battalion of accompanying weapons of the *Tagliamento* Legion.

The initial vehicle fleet, even though it was within the normal limits, was inadequate to the need, even though it had subtracted 4,600 lorries to the general availability. Increased to 5,500, it had little to do with the availability of means to the Russian front because of the high incidence of the failures, but made the initial sacrifice even heavier, as Italian industrial production was made difficult by the scarcity of raw materials.

## 2. TRANSFER AND WORK

The CSIR began the first echelon transfer on July 10 1941.

It involved;

- a railroad movement from Rome (*Torino* Division), Verona (Divisions *Pasubio* and *Celere*) and Cremona (CSIR Command) to the drainage area in eastern Hungary and between Marmaros Sziget, Felsoviso, Borsa (*Drawing no. 4*);

- an ordinary movement from the area of discharge to the area of assembly (9) which was fixed in Romania at the locations of:

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(9) It is the area where a unit or a complex of forces coming from the disembarkment areas or the railway terminal stations meets and re-orders waiting to reach the deployment zone on the front line.

**ZONE DI SCARICO E DI RACCOLTA DELLE UNITA' DEL CSIR PER L'AVVIO ALLA ZONA DI SCHIERAMENTO**

**POLONIA**

**URSS**

**UNGHERIA**

**ROMANIA**

**ZONA DI SCARICO**

**ZONA DI RACCOLTA**

**Div. Celere**

**Div. Pasubio**

**Div. Torino**

**CSIR**

**INTENDENZA SPECIALE**

**COMANDO**

**Km**

**10**

**30**

**50**

- Cura Hormolui - Falticeni - Suceava, for Divisions;
- Botosani, for the Command of the Corps of Expedition and for the Units and Services of the Command itself (*Drawing No 4*)

The movement to carry the entire Expeditionary Corps lasted twenty-seven days, requiring the use of 216 trains, divided into five blocks, and ended on August 5 (10).

The distance to the discharge area from the trains, 80 km deep, to the gathering area was about 280 km.

The availability of a single freighter to reach the rally area (a highway that winds over one hundred kilometers to the Carpathian arch and which did not have enough width to allow double transit to heavy vehicles, almost all Lancia 3 RO with trailer); The limited availability of vehicles; The mountainous nature of the region crossed, in addition to the not negligible distance to travel, created a series of difficulties which were, moreover, overwhelmed by all the members of CSIR. Within a few days, the following were provided: to the full carriage of the two Divisions and un-Motorized Units and Services of the Corps; To the allocation of reinforcement means to the Celere Division; The movement of all the motorized units of the Army Corps and, finally, the forwarding of the warehouse depots and magazines of the Intendent establishments, for the constitution of the Suceava advanced base, which should be carried out at the same time as the units in motion, So that they can assure, immediately, caretaking and operational possibilities.

Among the difficulties that have been said, one remembers, in particular, that it could possibly be avoided and that it generated some delay in the meeting of all the units of the Corps of Expedition in the gathering area. Although, in fact, the CSIR Command insisted that the part mounted on the horse of the Celere Division was made to continue by rail to Botosani, the German Command did not

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(10) During the transfer on July 13, General Commander Francesco Zingales was forced to stop the trip and be admitted to a Vienna clinic because of severe influenza with pulmonary congestion and high fever. He will be replaced next July 17 by General Giovanni Messe, who arrived directly at Marmaros Sziget. General Zingales will return to the Command of CSIR, which in the meantime became the XXXV Army Corps of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, on 1 November 1942, when General Messe will leave the Russian Front for rotation. On 25 January 1943 he will take over in Tunisia the Command of the Army (composed of Italian and German units).

believe that it would adhere to the request; After that, two regiment commands and three cavalry squad groups, in addition to a group of horse artillery batteries, had to ride from the unloading area from trains in Hungary to Gura Hormolui in Romania. So when the *Pasubio* and the *Torino* divisions had already come to their destination, the *Celere* was still marching on horseback through the Carpathians.

Overall, CSIR provides:

- A *truck transportable Army Corps Command* with the following directly dependent units: a machine gun battalion; A anti-tank battalion; A motorcyclist company; A motorized artillery grouping with 3 groups; 2 groups of anti-aircraft artillery; 4 engineer battalions, including two bridging, one artillery and one link; An aeronautical observation group with three squadrons; A fighter group, with four squadrons; A CC.NN. Legion with three battalions;

- *two truck transportable Divisions*: the *Pasubio*, with 79<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiments and the 8<sup>th</sup> Divisional Artillery Regiment; the *Torino*, with 81<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> Infantry regiments and the 52<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Artillery Regiment;

- a *Celere* [fast-moving] Division, the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Prince Amedeo di Aosta* (PADA), the 3<sup>rd</sup> bersaglieri regiment, the *Savoia* and *Novara Lancieri* cavalry regiments, a L/3 tank group, the artillery regiment on horseback;

- *nine truck units* distributed among all CSIR units;

- *an Special Intendenza East* [Quartermaster Corps] comprising the following Logistics Services: Health, Police, Administration, Artillery, Engineers, Chemical, Horse and Veterinary, Transportation (a total of 12 truck units), automotive, stages [rest area units], postal and telegraphic services;

- *Twelve sections Carabinieri*.

In total:

62,000 men;

17 rifle battalions (of which: 12 of line infantry, .3 of bersaglieri, 2 of cc.nn.);

7 battalions of accompanying weapons;

1 battalion pioneer;

14 autonomous companies (of which: 2 of motorcyclists, 4 of mortars 81, 8 of

47/32);

10 cavalry squadrons (of which: 8 squadrons of cavalry and 2 squadrons of machine guns);

4 squadrons of "L" Tank (60 tanks);

14 artillery groups (of which: 3 of 105/32, for 9 batteries with 36 pieces, 2 for 100/17, for 6 batteries with 24 pieces, 7 for 75/27, for 18 batteries with 72 pieces, 2 of 75/46 anti-aircraft pieces, for 8 batteries with 32 pieces);

10 autonomous batteries (of which: 2 of 65/17 for 8 pieces and 8 of 20 mm. anti-aircraft for 64 pieces);

4 battalions of engineers (of which: 1 of artisans, 1 of connections, 2 of bridging);

6 autonomous companies of engineers (of which: 3 artisans and 3 connections);

1 chemical battalions.

Thus prepared, with weapons, means and operational possibilities that certainly did not exclude the fighting spirit of men, CSIR entered in August 1941 to stand alongside a strong German army, whose power had been brought to a very high degree in line with the ambitious aims of its rulers, to fight against an equally powerful Soviet army, animated by the conviction of fighting for a just cause such as defending its own country.

The Italian Expeditionary Corps will advance fighting at Donez's mining area. Here 9 July 1942 will be incorporated into the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army under the name of XXXV Army Corps - CSIR.

An overview of the operations carried out by CSIR from August 1941 to the end of June 1942 is outlined in *Drawing no. 5*.



**C S I R dalla zona di radunata (Moldavia Romena) al bacino minerario del Donez**  
(12 luglio 1941 - 8 luglio 1942)

The map illustrates the railway network connecting the Moldavia-Romania border area to the Donbas basin. Key locations marked include Kiev, Dnepropetrovsk, Zaporozie, and the Donbas region. The map is divided into sections labeled R, A, I, and N. The Dnieper River and the Azov Sea are also shown.

## CHAPTER V

### THE OPERATIONS ON THE FORCING OF THE DNIEPER

When the Commander of the German Army, whose dependence the CSIR was intended to operate, expressed the wish, at the end of July, to be able to immediately dispose of at least one Italian Division, the situation of the Great Unit of the Corps was the following:

a. *Divisions Pasubio and Torino*: they had completed the meeting in Suceava and Falticeni respectively;

b. *Celere Division*: In spite of the insisting requests for the unloading of trains in Romania (Botosani - Suceava area), at least of the units on horseback in Hungary (Borsa - Marnaros Sziget area), the responsible German command only partially adhered to that request. It resulted from a disordered gathering of the *Celere*, for the two cavalry regiments and the horse artillery regiment remained fragmented with their own squadrons and their batteries partly in Botosani and partially at Borsa. This produced a noticeable delay in the overall availability of the Division and caused an extraordinary expense of energy for horses;

c. *Units of the Army Corps*: Most were still traveling from Italy to the discharge stations (ie not yet in the area of assembly);

d. *Logistics Services*: Not yet in condition to working because:

Between the supply and rallying area ranged from 250 to 300 kilometers, and this distance, far above the truck half- stage, required at least twice the number of available vehicles for normal supplies;

- the numerical insufficiency of the vehicles prevented the planning of the important supply problem which, from the precarious stage on which the imperious requirements imposed it, should have been permanently fixed and resolved, especially with a view to the subsequent development of operations.

In summary, an incomplete gathering and logistic deployment had already come to an end and was already in crisis, before the CSIR moved from the meeting zone to the operational area.

The German Commander's request to be able to use a CSIR Division immediately was justified by the particular situation in which he was at that time.

It was deployed on the southern course of the Dniester, between the 11<sup>th</sup> Germanic Army and the 4<sup>th</sup> Romanian Army Forces, and from the north to the south, the following Great Units: the Hungarian Corps, 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army, XI German Corps, XXX Germanic Corps, IV Romanian Corps, LIV Germanic Corps.

The Armed Forces had forced the Dniester into more points and tried to make deep maneuvers to close the opponent's pocket and then destroy it later. The concept of the Germanic Commander was to make a turning maneuver between the Dniester and the Bug, in which the northern deployment of the Army would have been the marching wing. In its first phase, such an operational design could not be considered successful. In some places the advanced German elements had been strongly rejected and the situation remained very fluid. Major sites, whose possession could be considered as crucial as Balta and Krutyje, had been conquered and lost with alternate events on both sides.

This was to be attributed, in addition to the tenacious resistance and angry counter-attacks of the Soviets (whose unity, even though they were encircled, ended up struggling with their decisive behavior by encircling forces), even to the total lack of armored units.

This, between the Dniester and the Bug (mid-July - early August), was therefore not an easy time for the 11<sup>th</sup> German Army, which, among other things, was also without reserves, except of the Italian Corps of Expedition that was, as it was said, in those days, completing the gathering and was therefore not in the best conditions for immediate employment.

However, the Army Command with Order no. 3409/41 of July 21, 1941 ordered the CSIR concentration at Dniester to Jampol, which army reserve. However, this concentration could not take place since the tumultuous success of the events forced the movement so fast and swift that until the Dnieper the Italian Corps could not meet.

The CSIR Command set the new landing area on the highway of the Isvorj-Jampol, with the criterion of deploying at least one Division on the left of Dniester, with the dual purpose of reducing reliance on Jampol bridges when the entire CSIR would had to pass the river, and include in the location zone of each Division at least one highway for the needs of movement.

The transfer of the units would have to be carried out for subsequent truck transport, carried out by the XXIX Truck Group (the II Truck Group was engaged in the transport of the Services).

Based on these concepts, the CSIR Commander issued Operation Order no. 1 (*Document No. 24*) for the road haulage of the *Pasubio* Division, which, reinforced by the motorcycle company, had to reach the sector of probable employment for the first phase.

The movement began on July 30<sup>th</sup>, but the abundant rains of those days made the Division's move difficult, slow and tiring. Along the only Botosani - Belzy - Isvorj track, reduced to an impassable riverbed, the truck convoys were often immobilized and forced to stand waiting for the drainage.

In this road haulage, truck unit and vehicles of CSIR made their first hard experience at the eastern front, a long experience to renew themselves constantly, to form the dominant reason for the operational and logistical difficulties of units of the Expeditionary Corps for the duration of the entire campaign.

In order to have the Expeditionary Corps ready for operational use within the shortest time possible, the CSIR Commander would simultaneously launch the *Torino* Division, which had to move on foot into the area of Stefanesti - Sagajacani and then reach, a new location.

In the same days (31 July - 1 August), two requests from the 11<sup>th</sup> Army Command were received by the CSIR Command.

With the first of them, the German Command asked to have two Italian artillery groups to support the attack

of his XXX Corps. The Commander of CSIR, considering the situation of the German command that did not have long-range artillery and which faced a deployment of twenty-six Soviet batteries in the Krutyje area, adhered in good faith to the request.

The second request was in fact a memo, an order to speed up the pace of the Expeditionary Corps so that it could be placed within a short time in the Goraba, Plot, Pisarevka, Studenoje, Sagnitkov area to mop-up the ground between the LIV and the XXX Corps and restored Communications between the Two Great Units (*Document No. 25*).

With such an order, the Italian Divisions were in danger of being employed separately and for later times, and this was in contrast to the concept of unitary use of the Expeditionary Corps, contained in the directives of the Italian Supreme Command imparted to General Messe. He therefore decided to join the Order of the Armed Forces only after having collected at least the Divisions of *Pasubio* and *Torino* and all the artillery of the Corps. In the deployment area fixed by the German Command.

Consequently, the CSIR Commander draws up and draws Operation Order no. 4 (*Document No 26*) according to which:

- the *Pasubio* Division should have abandoned the truck transport in the Scholkani - Sorokj area (excluded) and continue the walk up to Olschanka;
- The *Torino* Division would be loaded in the Scholkani area on the vehicles made available by the *Pasubio* Division;
- The *Celere* Division, for which a gathering area had not yet been fixed, and which only *began* to flow into the territory of Botosani in those days, would continue to move normally to Sorokj.

Concerning foreseen use of the CSIR, General Messe pointed out to the Army Command that: the task of mopping-up and linking in a non-road sector was not adequate to the basic features of CSIR and that such use was, uneconomic because it would have forced the Italian units to leave their artillery inoperative and stop the motorized vehicles, thus reducing their ability to perform. In this regard, the Commander of the CSIR asked the 11<sup>th</sup> Army Command to re-examine the possibility of a more appropriate use of their units.

On August 6, the *Pasubio* came to Jampol and the following day the CSIR Tactical Command moved from Botosani to Olschanka.

Meanwhile, the situation of the 11<sup>th</sup> Army and other units operating on its flanks had been evolving, so that for the annihilation of the enemy between Dniester and Bug there were now three groups of forces in a state of interdependence. They were (*Drawing No 6*):

- the armored group von Kleist, who with a deep north - south advance had reached Pervomajsk just north of the Kodjma confluence with the Bug;
- The 17<sup>th</sup> Army, which had connected to Gaivoron with the left wing of the Armed Army;
- The 11<sup>th</sup> Army, which, as has been said, had been able to force the Dniester in several places.

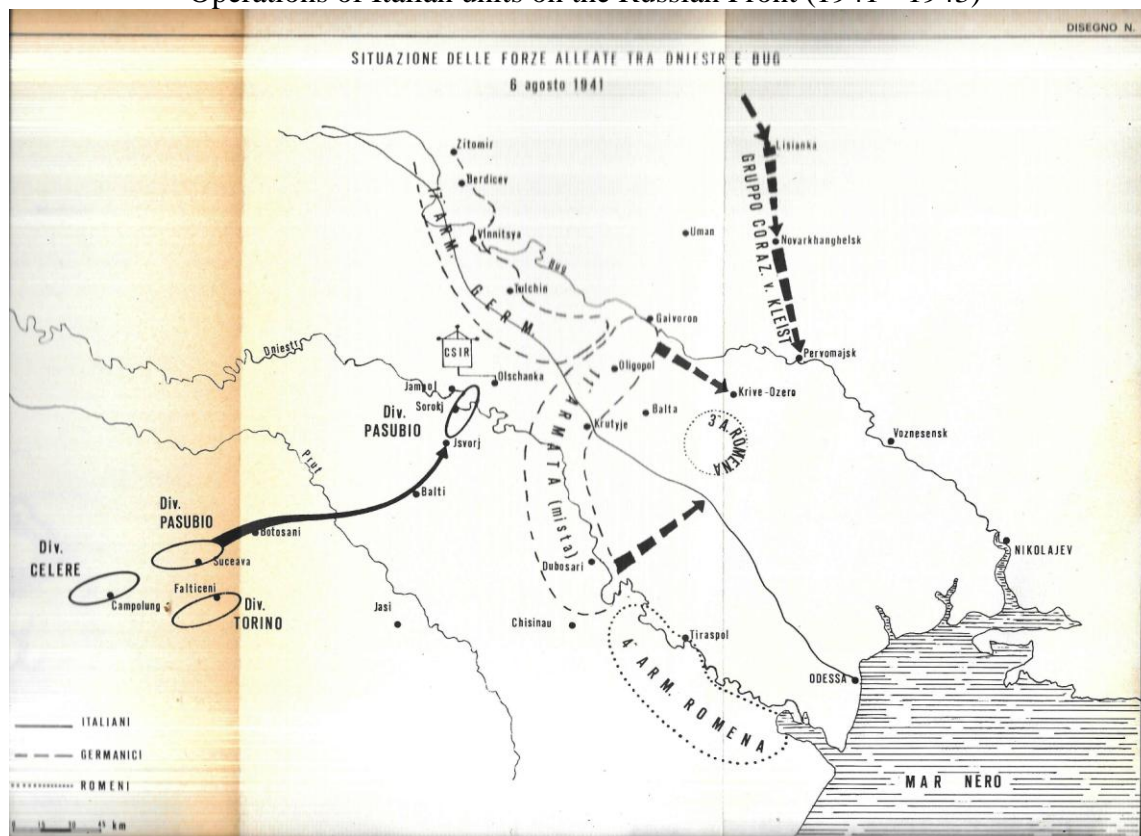
More specifically on the front of the 11<sup>th</sup> Army:

- The 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army was engaged in rafting operations to the east of the Vechofa - Schakokristische line;
- The XI Corps, which, having achieved the greatest results, deployed on the Savran - Chaschetvots - Gaivoron line;
- The XXX Corps, which has since July 30 received the Fransuskaja - Slobodsaja, could not continue for the numerous counterattacks and bad weather conditions;
- The IV Romanian Corps after having forced the Dniester at Paschkov had failed to widen the bridgehead and remained therefore deployed with the mass of its forces west of the river;
- The LIV Corps, which also forced the Dniester setting foot at Dubosarjar, could expand its bridgehead by arriving August 1<sup>st</sup> on the Osipovka-Pavlovka line, cutting off with its advanced elements the Odessa-Balta railway at Fatischin.

Summing up the operational situation on the front of the 11<sup>th</sup> Army:

- the two wings (XI and LIV Corps) had remarkably advanced;
- the center (XXX and IV Romanian Corps) remained behind.

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



In such a situation, the German Command decided to take advantage of the left wing, whose units ordered a turn to the south-east to lock down the Soviet units remaining between Dniester and the Bug.

The success of such a plan presupposed the availability of a mass of maneuver capable of moving quickly to prevent any possibility of withdrawal from the opponent and the only Great Unit which at that time, according to the Armed Command, was in a position to fulfill that the task was the *Pasubio* Division.

The Commander of the CSIR, considering the exceptional nature with which the delicate situation was present, and above all, held that the *Pasubio* was reserved for the important mission of envelope enemy units on the Bug and for that to cause the collapse of the resistance between the two rivers, he adhered to the request of the German Command to use the *Pasubio* in such action, with the consent of the Italian Supreme Command.

After orientating the Division on its new job, General Messe on 6 August sent to the other units the Order of Operation no. 8 to speed up the movement beyond the Dniester and tighten on the *Pasubio* Division already launched to the bridges on the Bug at Voznessensk.

In those days, the *Celere* Division overtook *Torino* in the area of Botosani, which, deprived of vehicles destined for the transport of the *Pasubio*, continued his walking transfers.

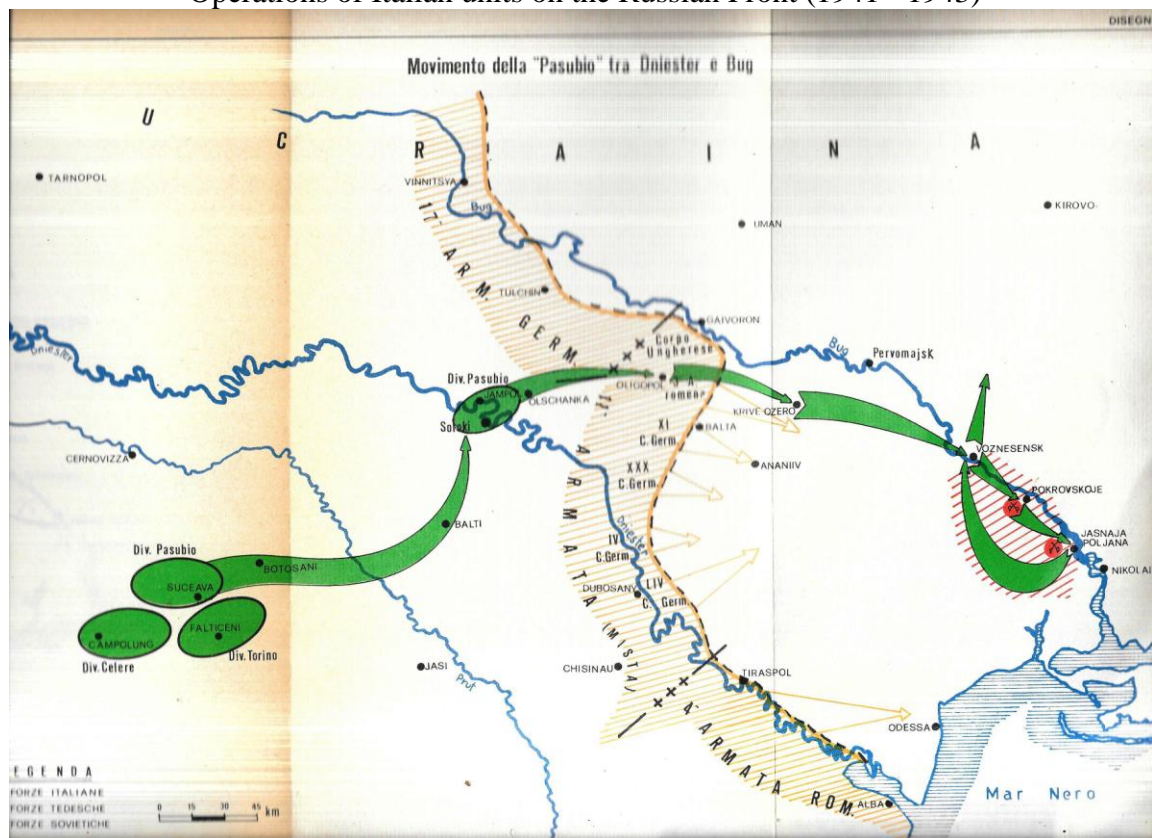
#### I. - FROM DNIESTER TO BUG (BATTLE BETWEEN THE TWO RIVER)

In the battle of the Germans for the annihilation of the opposing forces between Dniester and Bug, the *Pasubio* Division, reinforced by the 30th Armored Corps Artillery and the Motorcycle Company, had the task of reaching quickly the Bug north of Voznessensk and then proceed along the right bank of the river to Nikolaiev to complete the encirclement of the enemy (*Drawing No 7*) and to remove the Russian bridgehead in that locality.

Despite the many difficulties it was forced to overcome due to the slopes made impassable by bad weather and frequent



## Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



road breaks created by retreated Soviets, on August 10, the Division came with the avant-garde near Voznessensk, where the next morning resumed the southward movement. During the march, the column was surprised by a violent thunderstorm that, preventing any further movement due to road conditions, forced the bulk of the Division to stop.

The avant-garde (1) could continue, and after about 30 kilometers, at 13:00 on 11 August, the advanced elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Company Bersaglieri motorcyclist exploration encountered enemy resistance.

The fights that followed this first contact between the avant-garde Italian units and the Russian units of the rear guard were two: one was on the same day of the 11<sup>th</sup> north of the town of Pokrovskoje, where it was mainly engaged the III Battalion of the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry (head of the avant-garde); The other happened on August 12 near Jasnaja Poljana, supported by the I Battalion of the same regiment (which in the meantime replaced the III in the avant-garde head).

The two actions, the one 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup>, are described in detail in the report prepared by Colonel Epifanio Chiaramonti (*Document No. 27*) in the report of the *Pasubio* avant-garde commander, on August 19,

In particular, the day 11 action at Pokrovskoje was not of great significance and could be considered as the preview of the next day's fight at Jasnaja Poljana for the apparent intention of the enemy to carry out only interference, without letting himself engage in a real combat. However, the action itself was not discouraged because for two men killed and 3 wounded reported from the Italian side; 38 Soviet prisoners, 2 machine guns and other war material were captured.

The most important was the fight between Jasnaja Poljana on August 12<sup>th</sup> between the head of the avant-garde *Pasubio* (I/80<sup>th</sup> infantry) and the Soviet 469<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment, reinforced by three artillery batteries of the rear guard.

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(1) Comprised of the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Rome, by the III group of the 8<sup>th</sup> artillery regiment *Pasubio*, from the 1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri motorcycle company, from the 141<sup>st</sup> company 47/32 anti-tank guns, from the 1<sup>st</sup> 81 mm. mortar company of the IX division divisional battalion *Pasubio*, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> 81 mm. mortar company of the V mortar battalion, from a 20 mm section of the divisional anti- aircraft battery, a divisional engineers -artisans platoon and two RF3 A stations (totaling 4,500 men).

The fighting between the opposing units lasted a few hours (from 15:00 to 19:30), characterized by intense fire of artillery and mortars until the Soviets, threatened on the flanks and on the rear, decided to fall back.

The nightfall forced us to suspend the action. When Nikolaiev's bridgehead was cleansed - that took away from the Russians still operating between the two rivers the last chance to escape the encirclement - had certainly contributed to the threat of the *Pasubio*.

Jasnaja Poljana's fight had cost Italian troops engaged in the fight, 15 dead including 2 officers, 82 wounded, including 8 officers.

Commander of the Army, General Schobert, wanted to send to the Commander of the CSIR an attestation in which he said, among other things, that the *Pasubio* had "greatly contributed to the victorious action of the 11<sup>th</sup> Army".

Meanwhile, the Celere Division had come with its own means, traveling 340 km in seven days, to Petschanka (south of Oligopol); the *Torino*, the most rearward, had continued to walk to the Dniester; the tactical command of CSIR had moved from Olschanka to Oligopol.

## 2. - FROM THE BUG TO THE DNIEPER

The cycle of operations between Dniester and Bug ended with the arrival at the latter river of units of the German 11<sup>th</sup> Army.

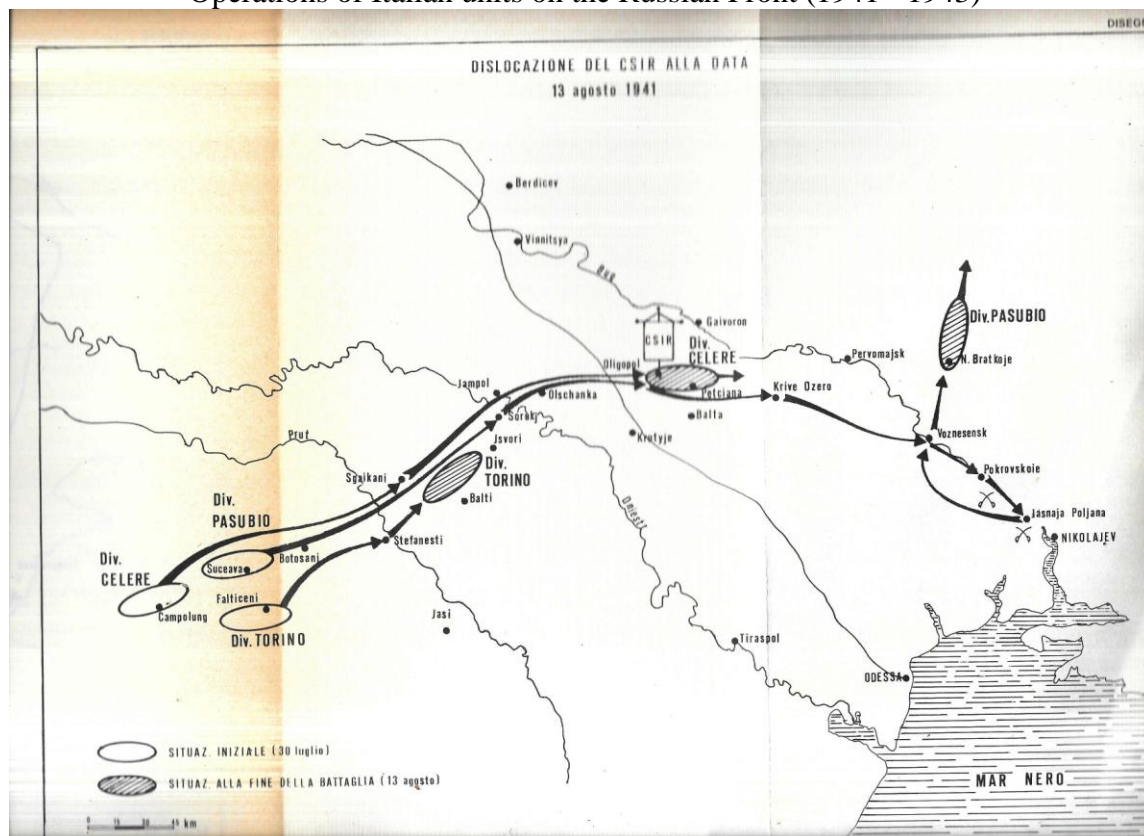
The Command of Army Group South therefore decided to move the Italian Expeditionary Corps to the direct command of the armored group von Kleist (from August 14), with which it would operate for about ten months, until June 1942, where it would have passed to the dependence of the Germanic 11<sup>th</sup> Army.

The deployment of CSIR on August 13, at the end of operations between Dniester and Bug, was as follows (*Drawing No 8*):

- *Command*: Oligopol;

- *Pasubio Division*: from the Pokrovskoje area was started to Bratskoje over the Bug, via the Voznessensk bridges, pending orders for the concentration of all CSIR units in the Dnieper;

## Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



- *Celere Division*: in the Oligopol- Petschanka area and in motion for Pervomaisk;
- *Torino Division*: in the area of Sagajacani and in the direction of Sorokj -

Jampol-Oligopol;

- *Corps Unit and Services*: in the area of Botosani - Olschanka - Oligopol-Botosani.

The changeover to the dependencies of the German armored group von Kleist allowed us to see two possible ways of using CSIR units:

- at first, a defensive action to protect the left flank of the same armored group in the march that it did from the Bug to the Dnieper;
- at a later time, offensive actions deep beyond the Dnieper.

The assignment of CSIR to a Large Mobile and Maneuvering Unit, which was the I armored group - assignment that included, besides, a change of its operational line from south to north-east - and the future use of the Expeditionary Corps, Characterized by wide-ranging mobility, confirmed that the German Command did not take into account the fact that the Italian units were not fully motorized and did not even take into account the serious logistical situation in which they dealt. General Messe again represented this situation at the German Command, while still working to make up for the operational commitments required of him (2).

General Messe then transferred to the dependent units, with Sheet 4288 of August 14, the guidelines on the future use of the dependent units, such directives:

- the *Pasubio* Division had to concentrate in the Annovka, Bratskoje area and then move on to the Kirovo-Kremenciug route;

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(2) As of August 11, the Commander of the CSIR had requested the Supreme Command to assign at least two other truck units. About sending other Italian forces to the Russian front, General Messe had so telegraphed in Rome: "It is indispensable that all units sent to this front are exclusively self-reliant *stop*. On the contrary, it is preferable to give up any force that would inevitably be left hundreds of kilometers back *stop*."

- The *Torino* Division, which for the time was still marching to Dniester, would have been truck transported as soon as *Pasubio* arrived at the Dnieper;
- The *Celere* Division was to focus on the Bug, in the Pervomajsk - Lissaja Gora area, to proceed to the Dnieper;
- CSIR aviation: moved to the Kirovo airfield from August 22 (holding a fighter squadron available) since the Tudora airfield was far behind for the new operational needs.

Meanwhile, the armored group von Kleist, moving rapidly from Bug to Dnieper, was close to the conquest of the bridges of Dniepropetrovsk and Zaporozje on the Dnieper, the only passage of the southern course of that river. The purpose of his action was to cutoff the retreat to the opponent and make sure that two bridgeheads were formed for the further development of operations toward the east.

Consequently, the Movement of the Expeditionary Corps could not only have solutions of continuity, but also seek to maximize the power of all human and mechanical energies, the pace appropriate to the extraordinary needs of the moment and the rapidity of the incident of events.

In particular:

a. *Pasubio Division*. - The maneuvering of the armored group von Kleist, as well as the full availability of the forces, also on a robust protection of his left flank, and for that purpose on August 15, the Division, moved to the dependencies of the German III Corps, it was initiated in emergency in the Tschigirin area to stand on the right bank of the Dnieper, including Topilovka and Kryukof, to replace the German *Wiking* Division that was to be deployed further south.

The march of the *Pasubio* from the Bug to the Dnieper took place among the heaviest difficulties, especially logistic, and under air bombardment. However, in two days it reached the river, proceeded to replace the *Wiking* and on August 18 it assumed the responsibility of the defensive sector entrusted to it. Three days later, on August 21, it was replaced by three Germanic divisions (97<sup>th</sup>, 125<sup>th</sup> and 257<sup>th</sup>), truck transported further south, siding between Koluskino and Verhniednieprovsk, replacing again in turn

the *Wiking*, and other German troops destined for the maneuvering of the III Corps for the Dniepropetrovsk bridgehead.

The work and behavior of *Pasubio* was appreciated by the Commander of the German III Corps, who wanted to quote the Italian unit in his Orders of the Day of 21 August (*Document 28*) and in the greeting that the Commander himself sent on 2 September When the Division was returned to CSIR's dependencies;

b. *Torino Division*. - The business activity to which *Pasubio* had participated had not allowed the *Torino's* transport to be available. It had therefore reached the Dniester on foot in the area of Sorokj;

c. *Celere Division*. - In order to free its units from the defense of the Dnieper line to allocate them to the planned breakthrough maneuver of the opposing front, the 11<sup>th</sup> Army Command demanded that the CSIR be present on the river by 20 August with its massed Forces, to ensure the integrity of the positions reached.

It was therefore necessary to have on the Dnieper before that date of at least two divisions. Considering that *Pasubio* was already on the site, the solutions that came to the Commander of the CSIR were two: either truck transport the *Torino*, or advancing with its own means the *Celere*. The first solution was discarded, given the impossibility of having trucks for the transportation of the Division, General Messe came to the second; This solution, however, could not have been fully implemented in order to not significantly affect the efficiency of horse mounted units. In fact, they had already covered 750 kilometers from the unloading areas in Hungary, and any further strain outside the norm would have compromised efficiency.

It was then decided to immediately transfer to the Dnieper all the motorized units of the *Celere*, plus *Torino* artillery regiment and Army Corps units. The troops on horseback would go on in normal stages.

The Command of the Armored Group von Kleist, however, was in a shortage of fuels and was unable to supply the Italian echelons, which had to stay inactive for several and fractional days, without even being able to take advantage of those unforeseen days to recover the *Torino*;

*d. Units of the Army Corps:*

- The aviation, due to the unavailability of the Kirovo airfield, had reached Krivoj Rog on Aug. 21, from which it had begun its activity to protect the bridges and units deployed on the Dnieper;
- The I and IX Bridging Battalions, at the request of the Command of the First Armored Group, had been sent to Dniepropetrovsk for the construction of a crossing on the river, intended to fuel the fight in the bridgehead;
- the remaining units were blocked behind;
- CSIR's tactical command had moved to Pervomajsk, on the Bug.

Received the fuel on August 28, the movement could be resumed and on 3 September CSIR arrived at the Dnieper with two divisions, the *Pasubio* and the *Celere*, and part of the army corps units, joining the advanced units of the von Kleist Group. Meanwhile, the *Torino* was also closed on the river, compatible with the availability of vehicles.

Many units of the Corps, however, and most of all the elements of the logistics chain, were still scattered over a 300-mile deep line. Hospitals, field ovens, ammunition depots, engineer materials, clothing stores and equipment, quartermaster delegations, parks, and workshops were on the endless line of communication without any possibility of shift due to transport inadequacy.

The most advanced railway station was in Belzy, 380 kilometers away from the Quartermaster Delegation closest to the operating units, and only early September was expected to put in operation some advanced railway trunk.

At 08:00 on September 5, CSIR assumed the responsibility of the front assigned to it, deploying, in a wide area about 100 kilometers, between the Varskja river of Kobeljaky and Dniepropetrovsk (excluding), with the *Pasubio* Division in the first line and *Celere* divisions, reinforced respectively by 1<sup>st</sup> motorcycle company and the II Anti-tank battalion (less a company) behind. The Corps Artillery acted with a group in the *Pasubio* and two groups in the *Celere* group. In second line the company of the same anti-tank-battalion and, upon their arrival, the *Torino* Division and the CC.NN Legion, Tagliamento (Operation Order No. 14 of 3 September).



Meanwhile, taking advantage of the stoppage due to enemy resistance to the development of the German maneuver, the trucks, made available by Pasubio, were used for the transport of the *Torino*. At the same time, the armored group von Kleist asked to be able to have that division available as soon as possible, as it was assigned defense of the sector south of Dniepropetrovsk. It was not possible to fully implement with the urgency required for this request, and the Commander of the CSIR then held that a column of two battalions of the 81<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment preceded the major part of his own Division using motor vehicles temporarily taken from those of the CC.NN. Legion.

The 81<sup>st</sup> infantry regiment, reinforced by the 52<sup>nd</sup> artillery, assumed on September 13<sup>th</sup> the defense of the sector entrusted, the sector that the on the 15<sup>th</sup> could be garrisoned over by the whole *Torino* Division, finally reunited after about fifty days of exhausting marches on foot, to other units of the Expeditionary Corps.

The work of CSIR at this stage of operations is part of the great German maneuver that began on 14 August and ended in Kiev on 19 September with the Germanic victory. In this maneuver, two armored groups, corresponding to the forces of two armies, Guderian from the north and von Kleist from the south, had to cross the Dnieper line at Kiev, to meet behind the Soviet units defending in that sector, isolating them in a big pocket. At the same time infantry waiting at the river had to act frontally on the Russian units to break the line into smaller pockets.

The initial task of CSIR was to secure the defense of the Dnieper line between the 17<sup>th</sup> Army and the III Corps of the von Kleist Group. As it has been said, a sector over 100 kilometers wide and with the arrival of the units of the *Torino* Division expanded another 50 kilometers south of Dniepropetrovsk, until Augustinovka.

The tenacity of the Soviets resistance had not allowed the III Corps to breakout from the Dniepropetrovsk bridgehead so that the armored group von Kleist had to start the Dnieper passage in Kremenciug on 12 September, leaving the responsibility of defending the river to the von Roques, to whom the CSIR was also temporarily transferred.

The activity carried out by the Expeditionary Corps since September 5 (the date it assumed the sector's responsibility on the Dnieper), up to the 18<sup>th</sup>

of the same month (the date on which the CSIR deployment was undergoing a change with the departure of the *Pasubio*, called to operate elsewhere, as will be seen later), is characterized by vigorous patrol action, sudden attacks, intense artillery activity, various demonstrations.

Of particular importance:

- the assistance given by two groups of 105/32 of the 30<sup>th</sup> Regimental group and by a 100/17 group of the *Torino* to the operations of the III Corps for the extension of the bridgehead towards Kamenka (northwest of Dniepropetrovsk), a assistance which represented a very effective contribution to the success of the action. Attesting to the three groups operating from the Commander of the III Corps (*Document No. 29*);

- the reaction battles with which 181<sup>st</sup> infantry thwarted several times the adversary's intentions that he insisted on setting foot on the right bank, in the particularly delicate stretch of the front for the presence of numerous islets and for the confluence of Sarnara in the Dnieper.

But the work carried out by CSIR in this period, in addition to immediate and direct effects, also led to wider reflections in the general economy of operations in which the Army was engaged. In opposition to the attempts made by the adversary to earn the bank of the river, contributed to the failure of the Soviet effort to ease the pressure exerted northward by the German armored groups and cooperated with the success of Kremenciug. Maneuvering of the armored group von Kleist allowed to close the southern branch of the Kleist - Guderian jaw and launch on Kobeljaki - Poltava the 17<sup>th</sup> Army.

All Italian units, and in particular, 79<sup>th</sup>, 80<sup>th</sup>, and 81<sup>st</sup> infantry regiments were distinguished by the readiness to stifle the opponent's actions, the accurate organization and the brilliant conduct of the sudden attack.

### 3. - THE MANEUVER OF PETRIKOVKA

#### A) *PRELIMINARY ACTIONS*

The Italian maneuver of Petrikovka is part of the great battle of the Dnieper, during which the retreating Soviet forces tried to stop the German advance on the river and was the first

great maneuver that the Italian Expeditionary Corps brought to fulfillment with only its forces and its own means.

On 15 September, the German Command informed the CSIR Commander that the *Pasubio* Division would have to cross the river on the 18<sup>th</sup>, because it was intended to protect the right flank of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army operating on Kobeljak and Poltava. Towards the middle of September, General von Kleist, after the difficulties encountered by the III Corps to cross the Dnieper from the Dniepropetrovsk bridge heads, had come up with part of his forces (XIV Armored Corps) on the right bank of the river and had overtaken the Dnieper at Kremenciug, conquered the 10<sup>th</sup>. From this location he aimed north, encircling, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Group, great enemy forces; that had thus facilitated the advance of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army on Poltava, whose right flank was to be protected, by the *Pasubio*.

On September 16, the Commander of CSIR formulated Operation Order no. 16 (Doc. No 30) and ordered that the area under the *Pasubio* be entrusted to a *Celere* formation group (3). The *Pasubio*, temporarily assigned to the dependencies of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army, passed the Dnieper to Derijevka on September 18 to attest at the Orest, facing south east, in the stretch between its confluence in the Dnieper and Voinovka.

Meanwhile, the operational situation was gradually growing towards resolving. Four days later, the CSIR (less the *Pasubio*) passed together with the III German Corps (Divisions 60<sup>th</sup>, 198<sup>th</sup> and SS *Wiking*), the Mackensen group, which had been tasked with defending the Dnieper between the mouth of Orelj and that of Mokraja Sura. In this way, the mass of attack intended to exploit the effects of the maneuver of the Great Armored Units was thus prepared.

With this concept, the *Torino* Division, reinforced by the 63<sup>rd</sup> Legion CC.NN. *Tagliamento* and the II anti-tank Battalion was placed in the Dniepropetrovsk Bridge Head for the imminent action, and on September 21, crossed the river.

Thus, when *Pasubio* (north) crossed the river at Derijevka's bridges to pursue their goals, the *Celere* (in the center) remained in defense of the Dnieper and *Torino* (south) lined up

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(3) Composed by: the Novara Lancieri regiment, a Bersaglieri battalion, a Bersaglieri motorcyclist company, a mortar battalion, and a 47 anti-tank company, and reinforced by a 100/17 group. The Deputy Commander of the Division took over the command. The cluster will return to the *Celere* on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

on the left bank of the river, the best conditions were finally created, so that the Italian Expeditionary Corps could operate massively, with convergence of goals, in a battle that, engaging the opponent in the great Dnieper trap between Orelj and Dniepropetrovsk, would provoke the encirclement of Soviet units and preclude them from any retreat (*Drawing No 9*).

The Soviet deployment ran along the river to the mouth of Orrelj and therefore supported the right wing at the same watercourse that the German armored units had to cross over to take over the ground of the enemies first line of the Novomoskovsk industrial center.

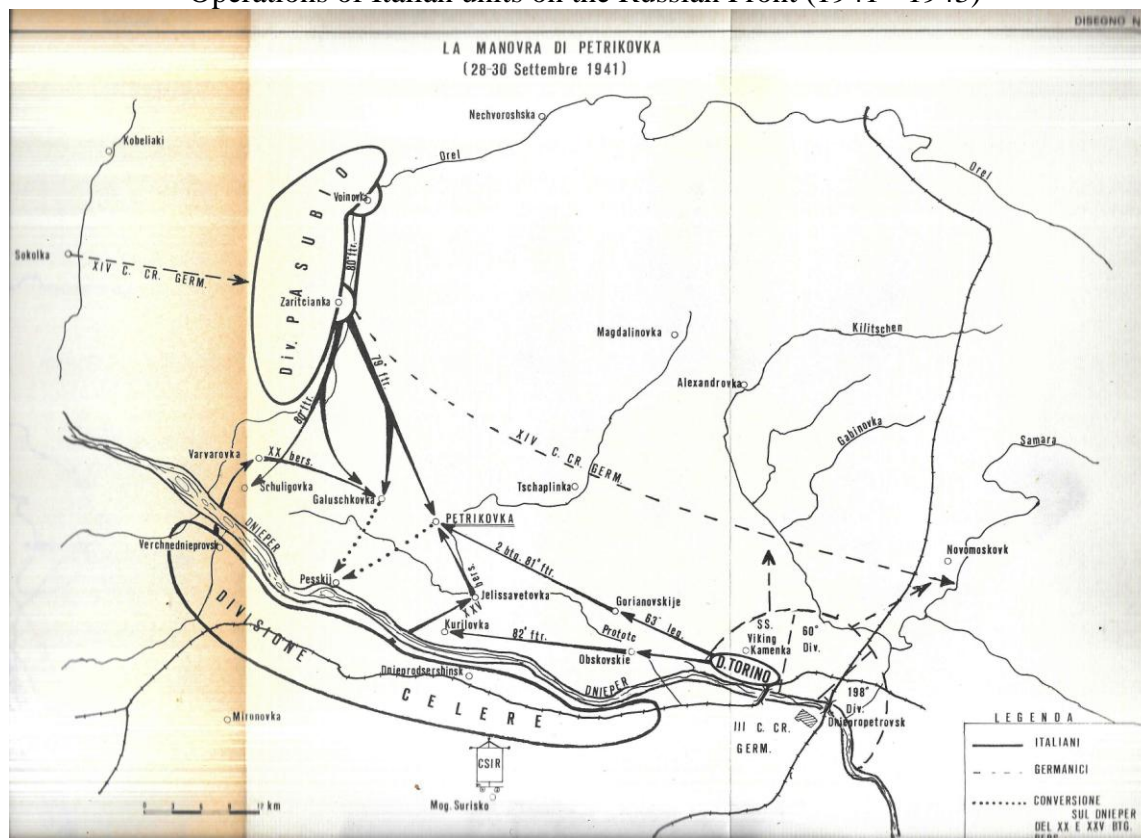
On the evening of September 22, the *Pasubio*, reinforced by the motorcycle company, by a "L" tanks squadron of the *Celere* and the German Abraham group (230<sup>th</sup> regiment and artillery units), deployed, as was said between Voinovka and the Orrelj confluence in the Dnieper; It received the order to form at Zaritcianka a bridge head of amplitude sufficient to allow the outlet of the German armored units.

The action was carried out by the 79<sup>th</sup> *Roma* Infantry Regiment, supported by two groups of the 8<sup>th</sup> artillery and the Abraham group, placed under the Italian regiment's dependencies, and started at 05:00 on 23<sup>rd</sup>. Despite the Russian's tough resistance, even from the intense fire of their cannons and the low-altitude strafing of their aviation, before the dusk the bridge head could be said to be built on an area of about ten square kilometers firmly guarded by the Italian and German units.

The Russians counter-attacked the bridgehead for three consecutive days on September 24, 25 and 26, giving rise to a violent struggle characterized by a series of clashes with the white arm, where the Russians' enthusiasm and tenacity were validly rimmed by proud Italian - Germans aggressiveness. However, they remained the master of the conquered bridgehead, thus allowing the Germanic armored units to cross over the Orelj for the completion of the maneuver.

Further north, with surprise action,

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



With the feat of arms of Zaritcianka and Voinovka, therefore, the gateway of the entire armored German contingent was opened, which would oblige the Soviet divisions to retreat to the Voltsctja River.

On the eve of the action on Petrikovka, that is, on September 27, the operational situation was as follows (see *Drawing No. 9*):

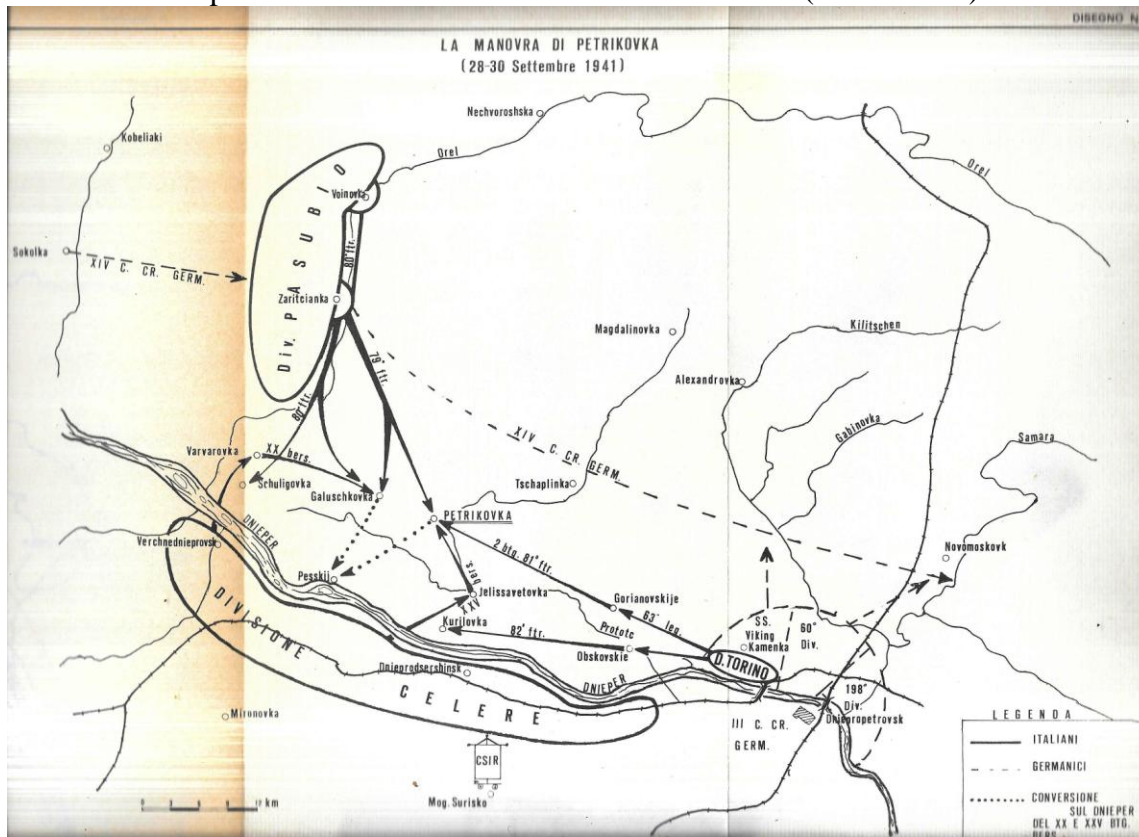
- behind the Orelj, from Nechvoroshska to Zaritcianka, the *Pasubio* Division;
- along the right bank of the Dnieper, between the Orel slopes and the Dniepropetrovsk bridgehead (excluding), *Celere*;
- in the Dniepropetrovsk Bridge Head, the 3rd German Body with the Divisions *Wiking*, 60<sup>th</sup> motorized and the 198<sup>th</sup>, deployed from left to right. Behind *Wiking*, the *Torino* Division all over the Dnieper,

## B) THE MANEUVER

It was the intention of the German Command to break the opposing line that was clenched from near the Dniepropetrovsk bridgehead and to join the columns coming from the north. The XIV Armored Corps had therefore to break out of Orel and aim at Novomoskovsk where he would join the III Corps that from the Dniepropetrovsk bridgehead had to advance with its three divisions on the same goal to then turn east and arrested on the line of the Samara river.

In this operational plan, the Commander of the CSIR intends to pursue a pincher action with the Northwest *Pasubio* and the Southeast *Torino* to close any escape route to the Soviet forces located in the Between the Dnieper and the Orelj. The area of Petrikovka was the gate to throw and, once closed, the opponent could no longer escape the bag. In order for the maneuver to take place, however, the full availability and concomitant convergence of the efforts of all three CSIR Divisions were necessary, so General Messe had to ask the Commander of the German 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army that the *Pasubio* was directly dependent on him. Having received the return of the Great Unit, the Commander of CSIR formulated orders for the implementation of his own concept of action that had to be developed in three phases:

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



- September 28: Attack of the *Torino* Division on the Soviet positions that enclosed the bridgehead;
- September 29: Convergent action on Petrikovka of the Divisions *Pasubio* (north) and *Torino* (from the south);
- September 30: capture of the enemy forces sealed in the sack, with the assistance (from the west) of the *Celere* Division.

The 1<sup>st</sup> phase operations began at 07:30 on September 28, when *Torino*'s infantry units, after a brief but intense preparation of artillery, sprung to the attack to push back the enemy to the west, widening the bridgehead and to reach the Obuskvskje - Gorianovskije line (see *Drawing No. 9*) in the day, and the German III Corps Divisions moved north - northeast.

The action of *Torino* took place with impetus and decision, despite the strong resistance of the Russians and the losses on the many mined fields with which the Soviets had barred all the passages and the slopes. At 16:00, the Division carried out its deployment on the line of assignment targets after having inflicted sensitive losses on the enemy and after capturing a few thousand prisoners and a massive plunder of weapons and materials. The action, among other things, was characterized by a perfect infantry-artillery co-operation in which the interventions of the 30<sup>th</sup> Artillery Grouping of the Corps, which, with the rational deployment of its groups, could pound the battleground.

Even the three German divisions had reached their goals and on the evening of 28 the General Messe ordered:

- to the *Torino* Division to continue the action on the 29<sup>th</sup> moving in two columns to the Kurilovka - Petrikovka line;
- to the *Pasubio* Division to move from the Zaritcianka area to the south and attest to the front Schuligovka - Prodanovskije - Galuschkovka - Petrikovka, to join with *Torino*, thus preventing any possibility of retreat to the Russians;
- to the *Celere* Division to ferry over the river to two bersaglieri battalions, which had to provide for the clearance of the area between Dnieper and Orelj and the connecting Kurilovka-Jelissavetovka.

Then 2<sup>nd</sup> phase operations started at 05:30 on September 29<sup>th</sup>.



The *Torino* Division advanced, as expected, on two columns constituted by two battalions of the 81<sup>st</sup> Infantry *Torino* and the Legion CCN, on the right, and the 82<sup>nd</sup> Infantry *Torino* on the left.

The right-hand column, continuing on the highway axel Kamenka-Popovka - Petrikovka-Zaritsianka, clashed with considerable Russian masses, in rout, who were looking for a way to escape and trying to open the road with their arms, won the residual area and started toward the rear of long columns of prisoners.

At 18:00 the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion of the 81<sup>st</sup>, avant-garde of the column, displaced substantial Russian units that prevented him from making the passage, met in Petrikovka with the units of the *Pasubio*.

The advancement of the left column had to proceed more slowly because it was obstructed in the movement not only by the enemy, but above all by the lack of roads and a long and unmanageable swamp, a condition which forced the column commander to maneuver with single units walking after leaving their lorries and motorized artillery on the positions reached the day before. However, the column occupied Kurilovka at 17:00 and was connected with the divisions of the *Celere* Division (XXV bersaglieri battalion).

The *Pasubio* Division, moving with a column composed by the 79<sup>th</sup> *Roma* Infantry Regiment, reinforced by two artillery groups and a squadron of "L" tanks, entered Petrikovka at 18:00 with its avant-garde in where it met the *Torino* infantrymen who were there just arriving.

The *Celere* Division, after ferrying in the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> the XX and XXV bersaglieri battalions, proceeded with the XX to sweep the zone between the left bank of Orej and Varvarovka; With the XXV similar task between the Dnieper and the line Kurilovka - Jelissavetovka. In the evening, the two battalions reached Galuschkovka and Petrikovka respectively, joining the units of the *Pasubio* and *Torino*.

In the operations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase, on September 30, while the units of the 80 Infantry *Roma* attended the Schuligovka-Galuschkovka line, the units already in the area completed the sweep of adjacent land and the two bersaglieri battalions reconvened on the Dnieper (see *Drawing No. 9*).

In the operation, the Soviets suffered considerable losses and left in our hands about ten thousand prisoners after abandoning

on the field numerous weapons, carriages, pack animals and various materials (4)

CSIR losses amounted to 291 men out of combat, of whom 87 were dead (6 officers), 190 injured (13 officers) and 14 were missing.

Petrikovka's action ended with the first operational cycle of Italian units at the Russian front and ended in a positive way, despite the negligible difficulties encountered by the Expeditionary Corps.

The commitment have shown in this action of guns and gunners emerges from previous pages. Particularly worth mentioning is the work of the bridging and Aviation units which, after the end of the operation, made a significant contribution.

The importance of the bridges on the Dnieper does not need any particular illustrations when you think that three German divisions were deployed in the Dniepropetrovsk bridgehead as well as the *Torino* Division and that the fierce, bloody fighting never had any respite. The regular feeding of the fight was therefore a vital necessity, also because in the initial concept of the German command that bridgehead represented the outlet of armored units destined to operate on Karkov.

For about a month, the continuous action of Soviet artillery, which deployed on the Samara, striking the waters of the Dnieper, the I and IX Bridging Battalions struggled steadily in a laborious and risky work that the violence of the adversary reaction made arduous and unnerving. Both during the defensive battle and in the operations of the river forcing, and in Petrikovka's maneuver, the Italian bridging units worked tirelessly day and night to repair the damage caused by enemy bombardments, maintaining the bond between the two shores.

The aviation, which had already established itself in the defensive battle with exploratory missions and security cruises, participated with *Pasubio* columns at the Zaritcianka battle and then maintained the rule of heaven during the Battle of Petrikovka.

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(4) Precisely: 9 cannons, 13 mortars, 186 automatic weapons, 4,500 rifles, 5 trucks, 7 inefficient tractors, several tons of oil, 450 tanks, 1,000 horses and other material.

CHAPTER VI  
THE OPERATIONS  
FOR THE CONQUEST OF THE INDUSTRIAL BASIN  
OF THE DONEZ

Until the Dnieper, the Soviets attempted to stem the German advance with great battles, throwing with no reserves enormous amounts of forces and means in the huge fight.

The sensitive losses in this effort, the capitulation of Kiev with the capture of more than 600,000 prisoners, the German actions on Karkov and Poltava, the events between Orelj and Dniepropetrovsk, were serious blows to the Red Army, which already had left large quantities of men and materials in German hands during the Battle of the "Stalin Line".

The Soviet Supreme Command therefore oriented its operational plans on the conduct of the war towards the traditional strategy of retreat and space, a strategy that, in the early autumn rains, would have found the best conditions for a successful accomplishment.

On the German side, however, the operational problem was imposed on the need to make the most of the successes achieved and to quickly move on the new goals, not only to prevent the enemy from consolidating and reorganizing, but also to make full use of the brief favorability of the season.

The systematic withdrawal of Soviet units, protected by consistent, bold and retrograde maneuvering in a tedious struggle to impose German retardation and stoppage time, had to oppose German operations based on mobility and ruthlessness to neutralize or at least reduce the effects that the strategy Russian propelled himself with his retreat maneuver.

As far as the theater where CSIR was concerned, the objectives of the new operational phase were to overcome the conquest of the great industrial basin of Donez and the area of Rostov, a region of considerable economic and military importance.

From the economic point of view, the Germans and their allies possessing the region would have taken away many raw materials from their opponents and would have given them large centers of heavy Russian war industry. From a military point of view, new and profitable strategic horizons emerged, irrespective of the influence that the allied armies had in the vicinity of Caucasian and Asian regions.

The conduct of the new operations, therefore, was expected in a very challenging way both on the tactical and the logistic side. In fact, it was necessary to address not only the difficulties of maneuvering on large spaces with profound goals but feeding battles that had geographical proportions and demanded a truly exceptional logistic potential.

By narrowing the visual angle to the next CSIR operation, *a priori* for its units difficult tasks and not without unknowns: the organic structure of the three divisions not entirely suited to that theater of operations, the lack of means of transport, a logistical situation made difficult by the deep leap from Hungary to the Dnieper, constituted serious constraints on the use of the Expeditionary Corps, constraints that were made worse by the fact that the Italian units had to act in the von Kleist group, one of the most Fast and more modern Germanic Large armored units.

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The operational cycle between the Dnieper and Donez basin is divided into two distinct and distinct periods. The first of these concerns the actions between the Dnieper and Voltsctja, with North-South orientation, which led the armored group von Kleist to the Sea of Azov (1) in the Melitopol area, and in which the CSIR had the task to stand on the Voltsctja to protect the left flank of the German deployment.

The second period concerns the operations for the conquest of the Donez industrial zone in west - east and in which the CSIR was the left wing of the German 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army (formally the 1<sup>st</sup> armored group von Kleist), where it was framed.

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(1) The task of the von Kleist group was to encircle the 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army, which tensely resisted on the lower Dnieper the pressure of the 11<sup>th</sup> German Army.

1. - OPERATIONS OF THE 1<sup>st</sup> PERIOD (1 - 12 OCTOBER):  
FROM DNEIPER TO VOLTSCITJA  
AND CONQUEST OF THE PAVLOGRAD'S BRIDGE HEAD

After the end of the Dnieper battle, the situation in the CSIR field was as follows:

- XIV Armored Corps, coming from Orel through the bridgeheads of Zaritcianka and Voinovka, had managed to occupy the bridges of Novomoskovsk on Samara by surprise and intact;

- The III Corps, led by the Dniepropetrovsk Bridgehead, had stood on Samara, between Novomoskovsk and the confluence with the Dnieper;

- CSIR, after finishing operations in the Petrikovka pocket, was focusing on the Petrikovka-Dniepropetrovsk area.

The location of these units is indicated in *Drawing no. 10*.

Based on this location, and in relation to the time required for the complete availability of the units, the commander of the armored group von Kleist decided to:

- proceed with the XIV Corps from north to south to reach in the shortest time the parallel of Orechov;

- entrusting the protection of the exposed side to the III Corps, which had to move staggered deep and left;

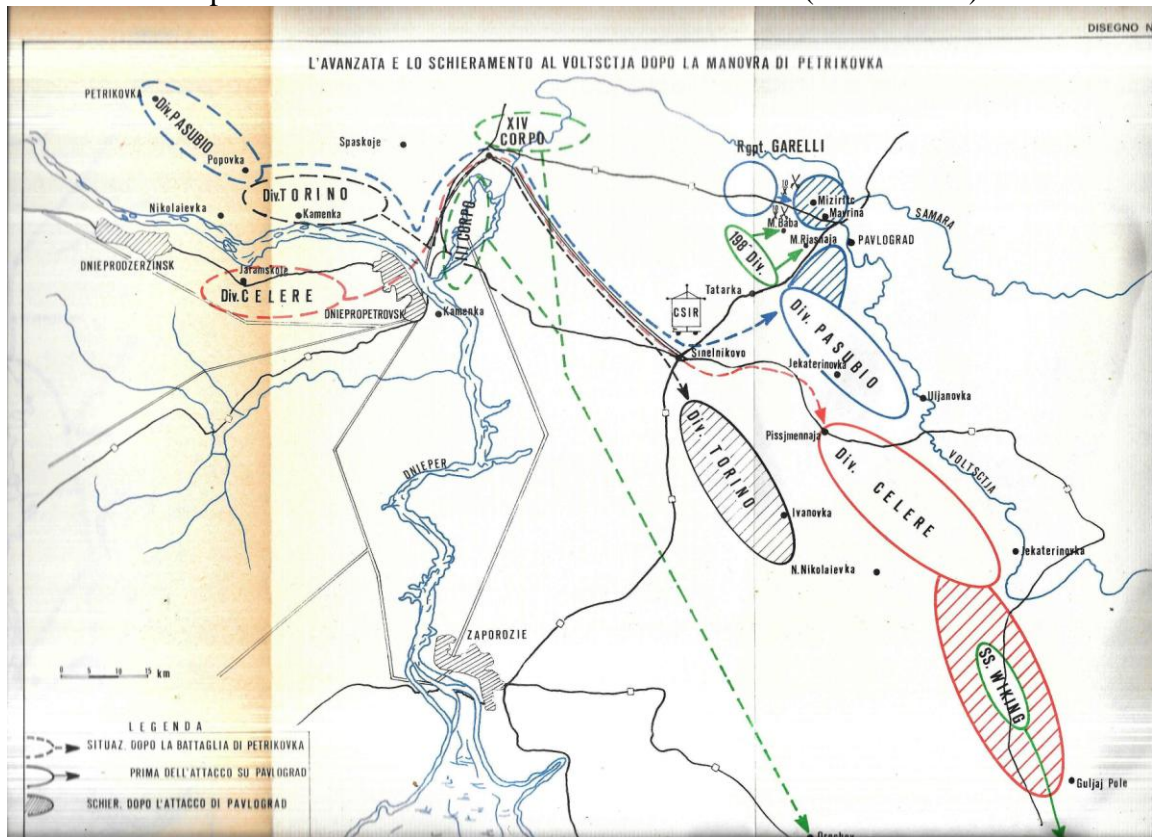
- to advance the Italian Corps to the Voltscitja River to take him south of Pavlograd, gradually replacing the III Corps with the wing protection task, and extending its entire deployment to the sea.

For the execution of this plan, with Order no. 59, the I Armored Corps Command von Kleist ordered the CSIR to deploy, from 3 October, a Division beyond Samara so as to immediately secure the protection of the exposed side.

The Commander of CSIR decided to entrust this task to the *Celere* as the *Torino* had no vehicles and the *Pasubio*, self-transported, was prevented by the torrential rains of those days that blocked the vehicles in the mud.

On October 1, General Messe therefore dispatched his Operation Order no. 21 (*Document No 31*) with which it held that

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



*Celere* immediately began the Dnieper transition to Dniepropetrovsk. Contrary to the predictions, however, *Celere's* passage of the river could not proceed with the desired expediency; Since in the meantime the roads had largely been drained and the German Command had delayed one day the time set for the preparation of the defensive flank by moving the date from 3 to 4 October, General Messe ordered the *Pasubio* to move, which would be immediately followed by the *Celere*. On 3 October, the CSIR Command moved north to Dniepropetrovsk and the 4<sup>th</sup> General Messe compiled in Operation Order no. 22 (*Document No. 32*) the executive provisions for the movement beyond the Dnieper.

Meanwhile, the advancement of the von Kleist group (2) towards the south had begun favorably and on the same day of the 4<sup>th</sup> the XIV Armored Corps had reached the Orechov region; The III Corps had rejected Soviet attacks alongside the XIV Corp and with the 198<sup>th</sup> Division had taken position in the Pavlograd area, protecting the exposed side. The 60<sup>th</sup> Motorized Division that operated to the right of the Armored Corps had occupied Zaporozje.

The movements of the Italian units to take to the Voltscija began on October 5th, and took place, hindered by bad weather, due to lack of vehicles.

On October 6, *Pasubio* was deployed between Pavlograd (excluded) and Ulianovka; on the following day of the 8<sup>th</sup> the *Celere* extended its deployment to the south, until Jekaterinovka and *Torino* concentrated on Kamenka to lock down the second formation. The CSIR Command moved from Dniepropetrovsk to Sinelnikovo.

The Italian-run line had an extension of about 100 kilometers to the west of the Voltscija, except for the left wing, in the 79<sup>th</sup> *Roma* Infantry Regiment, where the line ran more indoors because of the presence of the bridgehead of Pavlograd, which the Soviets defended accurately with the intent of inhibiting the passage of the river and blocking the road to Stalino.

Although no great action was taken, the Russians carried out an intense operational activity here. Artillery shootings, armored car raids, frequent surprise attacks, and patrol actions imposed numerous reactionary fights on the Italian units and a

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(2) On October 5, it would assume the new denomination of "1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army".

exhausting vigilance in a field as far as broad, as has been said, with respect to the forces that presided over it.

The insidious terrain also increased the difficulty while the bad weather conditions and the first snowfall made the stopping even harder on those positions that the short time available did not allow to organize and on which the units remained at the mercy of the weather as well as enemy attacks.

For the elimination of Pavlograd's bridgehead, the prelude to the further advanced east, the German command decided to attack Soviet positions in the direction of M. Baba and M. Riasnaja-Pavlograd, with its 198<sup>th</sup> Division, duly protected on the left flank by Italian units (*see Drawing No. 10*). In order to accomplish this task, the Commander of the CSIR ordered on October 8, the establishment of a special Armored Corps grouping with the 63<sup>rd</sup> legion Tagliamento (Less a battalion), a group of 105/32 of the 30<sup>th</sup> group, a motorcycle company.

The other groups of 105/32 of the 30<sup>th</sup> grouping supported the action of the 198<sup>th</sup> Division.

Along with the German Division's attack, the left wing of the *Pasubio*, ie the 79<sup>th</sup> *Roma* Infantry Regiment, would be moved to rectify its alignment, bringing it to coincide with the right bank of Voltsctja.

The action on the Soviet bridgehead, which occurred on the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of October, proceeded favorably at first, but the counterattacks of the Russians prevented progress beyond M. Baba. The German Command decided to use the Italian motorized group to turn the Pavlograd's positions to the left. The first target was the settlement of Miziritc, which was occupied by the Italian units at noon on October 10<sup>th</sup>. Given the favorable trend of the operation undertaken by units of the Italian formation, the Commander of the German Division ordered the grouping to continue in the attack and set the target for Mavrina and, where possible, the employment of the railroad. Despite the fierce resistance, the Italian column - guaranteed on the flank by the motorcycle company - penetrated into the opponent's position, including a large, deep anti-tank barrier and a line of barbed wire. The Russians were forced to withdraw after having suffered sensitive losses between dead and wounded, some hundreds of prisoners and much war material. The action, suspended for the coming of the night, was resumed the following morning; The Italian units took over the Railway bridge



at the very moment that German units came to the highway bridge that the enemy had destroyed. The interruption prevented Pavlograd's occupation; immediately the Italian I pontoon battalion launched a bridge crew and allowed the grouping to pass the river and assume the position on the left bank.

The behavior of Italian units in this action was praised by the Commander of the 198<sup>th</sup> German Division (*Document No. 33*).

After removing the bridgehead of Pavlograd, the *Pasubio* Division replaced the 198<sup>th</sup> German division, destined for other tasks, and extended its line-up to the left; the *Celere* Division made the online change with the SS *Wiking* Division also prolonged its own deployed to the south to Guljaj Pole (see *Drawing No. 10*), thus CSIR assumed responsibility for a wide front over 150 kilometers.

The advancement of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army to the Azov Sea had been favorable, with head units reaching Berestevoje and Mariupol, and linking with the 11<sup>th</sup> Army had beaten the 9<sup>th</sup> Russian Army.

In the southern part of the eastern front of the CSIR, the conditions for the conquest of Donez's rich basin were matured.

## 2. - OPERATIONS OF THE 2<sup>nd</sup> PERIOD (13 - 29 OCTOBER): CONQUEST OF THE DONEZ INDUSTRIAL BASIN

Even in other areas of the front, the overall situation seemed to be very favorable to the Germans. In fact: Leningrad is surrounded, Moscow seriously threatened by the concentrated action of the armored corps II, III and IV, the Soviet Western front in crisis after the fall of Kiev, the Russian armies of the southern front now forced to a fighting retreat in order to gain time in order to allow the removal of industrial facilities in the Karkov and Donez areas, were all conditions that allowed the German Command to the most optimistic forecasts, from which it came to the sensation of immediate and decisive events for the fate of the campaign.

The favorable forecasts of the Germans also found a foundation in the fact that no reserves of any consistency were identified

on the part of the Russians; It was also believed that they lacked the materials, weapons and ammunition necessary to rebuild a solid defensive line. The German Command ruled the Red Army now in an irreparable crisis and decided to win by October the resistance of the cities of Leningrad and Moscow and to occupy the Donez region at the same time. It did not exclude even that, allowing the season, success could extend beyond Donez, to the Caucasus. And since in that direction the serious obstacle of the Don line, northeast of Rostov, seemed to be necessary to accelerate the times and prevent the opponent in any probable operational plans he would have studied and implemented to form a new defensive front.

In the southern sector, however, the time was ripe to resume advancing towards Donez.

The Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army, in fact, received on October 8<sup>th</sup> the order to point eastward with targets Taganrog, Rostov, Stalino; The division of tasks among the Large Units employed was contained in the Order of Operation no. 2. In summary:

- III Corps: occupy Taganrog and build a bridgehead in Rostov;
- XIV Corps: Protection of the left flank of the III Corps;
- XLIX Alpine Corps: investment in the Stalino area;
- CSIR: secure the north side of the Army and “accompany the movement of the XLIX Alpine Corps”;
- 198<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division: After being replaced by the CSIR in its security tasks, it will be made available to the XLIX Alpine Corps;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army: sweep up enemy elements left in the current battlefield to the Berdjansk - Berestevoje - Semionovka line, keeping ready to continue on Mariupol to take over the coast;
- 60<sup>th</sup> Motorized Division: Army Reserve.

The Italian Expeditionary Corps, therefore, in the Battle Order for the eastward route constituted the northern wing of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Armory and had to stand between the XLIX German Alpine Corps to the south and the 17<sup>th</sup> Army to the north. The latter, however, still remarkably rearward, was not in a position to secure protection against the left side of the Italian Corps.

As mentioned, CSIR was entrusted with the double task of protecting the left flank of the Army from offenses coming from the north and investing, with the XLIX Corp, the industrial zone of Stalino with the primary aim of this important railway node and its great station.

The second operational cycle for the eastern front commenced for the Expeditionary Corps, during which it will take part in two important actions: the maneuver of Stalino and the Gorlovka-Rykovo maneuver.

#### A) THE MANEUVER OF STALINO

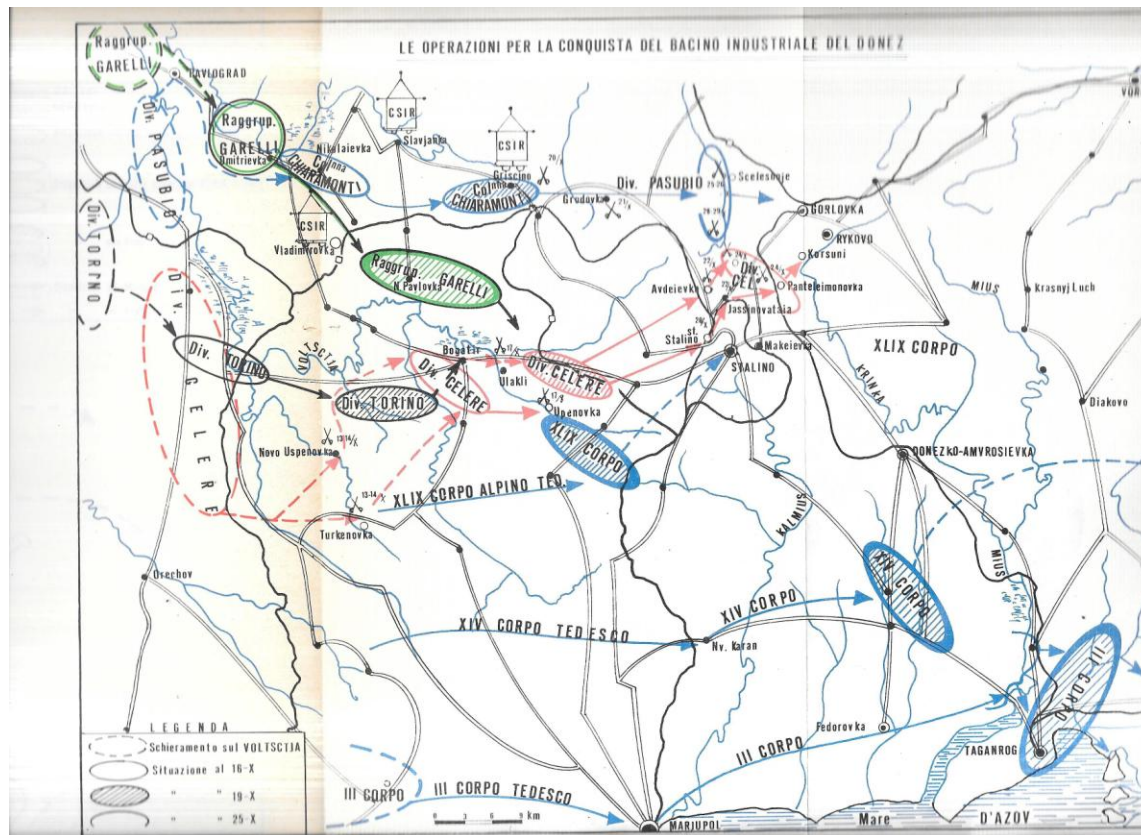
Based on the new tasks, the CSIR had to move from the defensive line, as indicated in *Drawing n. 11*, on offensive deployment. It is clear the situation of the first line *Pasubio* and *Celere*. However, an explanatory note deserves the situation of *Torino* still in a transfer crisis. In fact, the 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry, truck transported with vehicles taken from the *Pasubio*, and 52<sup>nd</sup> artillery less than one group, were waiting in the Tichonovcha area; The remaining units of the Division, with weary walking marches, mud, snow and rain, were then waiting in the Tatarka area. The Division, moreover, as well as the *Pasubio*, did not have a baggage train, because it remained remarkably rearward, and which therefore could not be counted for the time being.

Though viewed from a tactical point of view only, the problem of the immediate resumption of the forward movement was not without difficulties. It was, in other words, to concentrate in a few points of obligatory passage CSIR units deployed along the Voltscetja River on a 150-kilometer front, so that all the stakes could follow the necessary regularity. In addition, the destruction of bridges by retreating Russians, particularly in the Pavlograd area, left little chance for the outflows of the Divisions; There was also the danger of clogging and intermingling the columns, also due to the indescribable conditions of the roads, to which the pitfall of the mined fields flooded by a thick layer of mud was added.

Information about the enemy was not abundant or secure. It was, however, evident that considerable forces belonging to three Soviet divisions would hinder the advance on Stalino. The lines on which the resistance would have been encountered were well-identified in the south because they were made up of subsequent river courses

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map 11



of Jantschal, Mokrije Jaly, Suchije Jaly, while the most homogeneous terrain in the north did not exhibit topographical characteristics that would induce the formulation of valid predictions.

On the basis of such a situation, it would seem convenient to maneuver exclusively from the north, but action from the south was also indispensable to the Army for the imminent reflections it would have brought about the immediate security of its left flank. For this reason, taking into account the division of the Divisions on Voltsctja, the characteristics of the land and the road to the east of the river, the Commander of CSIR decided to launch the *Celere* Division south, particularly suitable for exploration and combat even in broken terrain, And to operate with the motorized and transportable forces north, where the terrain was best suited to the movement of vehicles and provided for a smaller number of interruptions.

General Messe therefore had the following: to collect the *Celere* and *Pasubio* on his outer wings; Launch the *Celere* against Stalino with the task of investing the city in cooperation with the XLIX Alpine Corps; Entrust to the *Pasubio*, shuffling backwards, the protection of the north flank and the task of widening, if necessary, the aggressive CSIR maneuver; To move as quickly as possible the *Torino*, which in the second line to the center, had to be able to intervene in all circumstances, if the resistance of the Russians had imposed a time to stop the advance of the Italian units. This deployment, while allowing it to move on the objective with the collected forces, was the most suitable to oppose any attempt against the CSIR exposed flank, during march.

The CSIR Commander (*Documents Nos 34 and 35*) are notified of such concepts. Operations in the Donzano basin until Stalino's conquest are graphically sketched out in *Drawing no. 11*.

On October 13, the *Celere* Division began at Guljaj Pole the advance beyond Voltsctja and after a tiring march between 13 and 14 with the cavalry regiments Savoy and Novara the river Jantschal, making the passage and forming two bridgeheads, one at Novo Uspenovka and the other at Turkenovka.

The 3rd Bersaglieri, however, was forced to stop at the Gaitschul River due to the prohibition of ground conditions, while the motorized elements had been blocked far behind by impassable road conditions.

Instead, the movement of *Pasubio* depended on the transitability of Pavlograd's interrupted bridge. However given that the bridging battalion

were already in route, it was foreseen that for the 15<sup>th</sup> day the passage would be restored. Therefore, in an effort to act as soon as possible with the *Pasubio* and to bring the *Celere* to the height of the XLIX Corps in order to fulfill in any way the task assumed by CSIR in respect of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army, on the evening of October 14 General Messe was issuing Orders no. 6810/Op. and 6816/Op. In accordance with which *Celere* resumed on the 15<sup>th</sup>, despite considerable difficulties due to the scattering of the forces, the unavailability of the elements of the Services, which had remained remarkably backward, to the exhausting fatigue they had undergone so many walking units as well as those on horseback to reach the stages within the expected time. It was a certain fact that the hourly speed of the echelon did not exceed two kilometers and that, to cover the daily itinerary, the whole day should be used from dawn to dusk and often until evening hours. However, the fixed locations were reached by *Celere* on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

Not so much as the *Pasubio*, still standing at Pavlograd because of the unavailability of the bridge. The prohibitive conditions of the tracks had impeded the arrival of the boat carriages a which, only because of the extraordinary abnegation of all, could finally come to the site, so that on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> the bridge was put into efficiency by the men of the I Battalion, that is, with only one day of delay on schedule.

But the *Pasubio* Command, unable to commence on the 15<sup>th</sup> the movements prescribed for the lack of the bridge (available as it was said only on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>), decided to use means of circumstance to pass the Voltsctja and on the same day of the 15<sup>th</sup> passed two infantry battalions, one of 79<sup>th</sup> and one of the 80<sup>th</sup> regiment, over the river, at the orders of Colonel Chiaramonti (Commander of the 80<sup>th</sup>).

In anticipation of the unsurpassable difficulties encountered by motor-driven units in the movement, the *Pasubio* Command followed the first two, two others battalions, on foot, provided by the "infantry", with the task of reaching them and joining them.

On the evening of October 16, the CSIR situation was as follows (see Drawing 11):

- the *Celere* Division had reached the line Zgl. Vassilievka Bol. Janisol;

- *Pasubio* was with the Chiaramonti column at Dmitrievka and Nikolaievka; and with the Division Command and two 79<sup>th</sup> infantry battalions in Pavlograd;

- the *Torino* still in march and considerably behind the other two divisions.

Meanwhile, the situation of the great Germanic units operating in the southern theater had gone so out of the way:

- The 17<sup>th</sup> Army (operating on the left of the CSIR) had reached the line Nikolaievka - Alexandrovka - Katerinovka (northeast of Pavlograd);

- The XLIX Alpine Corps was attested with advanced elements at the Suchije Jaly River;

- The III Corps, subjected to violent Soviet attacks supported by artillery, armored vehicles and large air formations that bombed and strafed the columns, had managed to form a bridgehead on the River Mius, where it had to stop because of the strong resistance and especially because of the shortage of supplies;

- The XIV Corps protected back and to the left side of the III Corps.

In essence, the southern wing of the Army began to undergo a major slowdown in the advance, while the operating concept of the Germanic Command was still aimed at a left-hand turning operation of the Soviet defense at Rostov's.

General Messe, in the late evening of the same day, 16<sup>th</sup>, issued new orders for the continuation of CSIR's advancement (*Document No. 36*).

In proceeding according to the orders received, *Celere*, who only advanced with cavalry regiments, came into contact with substantial Soviet rearguards, well supported by artillery, near the line of the Suchije Jaly River; but engaging him firmly on the front and threatening his wings on Uspenovka with Novara and Ulaklij and Jaly with the *Savoia*, forced his opponent to fall back after suffering considerable losses and capturing several prisoners.

This action was of particular importance not only because the opponent was again contacted after five days of very difficult pursuit marches, but also because the *Celere*

had established contact with the XLIX German Corps. This would have allowed to organize the attack on Stalino, which was the common goal of the Italian Division and the German Corps.

The *Pasubio* had come to Nikolaievka in the meantime, but had to stay there because of the impracticable state of the tracks and the break of the bridge. The Chiaramonti column, however, proceeded boldly in the retreating Soviet deployment, not only providing more security to the left side of CSIR but also making it available for the aid that could have given the *Celere* in the upcoming Stalino action when needed.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, only modest progress was made, despite the efforts by which the units came to gather and to reduce the vast scattering of forces and means.

In relation to the agreements with the XLIX Corps, the Commander of the CSIR on the evening of 18 October handled Operation Order no. 28 for the Stalino attack by the *Celere* and for the action of the other two divisions.

For the attack on the Stalino station, the Command of the *Celere* predisposes two columns:

- one, right, made up of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri, to whom the goal of Sofia and then Stalino was assigned first;

- one, left, constituted by the *Novara* Cavalry Regiment, who from Roja station had to point to Kurakovka and Mog. Pereskok with the task of flanking.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of October, with a very difficult progress made under a chilling rain, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri occupied Sofia towards the 11:00, after eliminating or capturing the elements of the opposing rearguard that operated in the town. The regiment continued in the pursuit of the Soviets and by 20:00 it became impetuous with the XX battalion from the Stalino railway station and railway node while it was joined by the XXV battalion.

The avant-garde of the German XLIX Corps entered the same time the town of Stalino.

As such events took place on *Celere's* front, the Chiaramonti Column of the *Pasubio* Division also made its way among Soviet rearguards, and on the same day, it won strong Russian resistance against the Griscino station; Towards Krasnoarmejskoje in the evening. The motorized grouping went on to occupy Novo Pavlovka from where



defeated enemy formations that, in retreat, destroyed the bridge over the Voltsctja (see *Drawing 11*)

The *Torino* Division, for which there was now every possibility of road haulage, between unpredictable labor and deprivation was carried to near the river Mokrjie Jaly, between Fedorovka and Komar.

The occupation of the city and of the great station of Stalino ended the first phase of operations for the conquest of the Donzono industrial basin (3).

The following considerations can be formulated on this stage. It featured the development of the march to Donez mainly three aspects: the depth of the rush, the character of the resistance given by the Soviets, the topographical and meteorological environment.

The remarkable depth of the rush (over 200 kilometers), especially if it was related to the need to reach the targets quickly, demanded that the conduct of the operations be based on the continuous use of the maneuver to which it was necessary to ensure, at every moment of the situation, And entrepreneurship: to maneuver to advance, to protect the hidden sides, to anticipate the adversary's attempts to attack from every direction, in this greatly assisted by ground that did not impose any limitation on the most profitable use of every weapon and every means And in particular of armored vehicles. In addition, the large-scale continuity of contiguous bodies in an advanced sector with a magnitude exceeding 100 kilometers, created a permanent crisis tactic. The length of the bound and the depth of the goals then required perfect coordination in the advance of the *Celere* and the *Pasubio*, so that the latter was constantly able not only to exercise effective protection against the sides of the deployment, but above all, to intervene with action from the north in the attack against the industrial center of Stalino. However, this necessity had considerable difficulties in achieving it because of the different organic characteristics of the two divisions.

The *Celere* was able to advance on any terrain, at least with the units on horseback, while the *Pasubio* advanced was tied to the vehicles and therefore to the state of the tracks.

The Soviet Command did not engage in any active maneuver, and tenaciously observed the rules of delayed action, but this did

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(3) CSIR losses: 61 dead, 143 injured and 8 missing. Prisoners captured 1,200.

width of the venue, Tactical Skill and Decision. The resistances that it opposed were essentially constituted by the activity of strongly armed rearguards and abundantly reinforced with artillery and mortars, who worked with firmness, knowledge and rooted awareness of the task to be performed. Thus, the move towards the Donez of CSIR units had to take place in a continuous succession of short-lived fights. The active resistance of the units was always coupled with passive defenses: minefields, scattered anti-personnel mines and anti-tank security, systematic interruption and destruction of all that could facilitate the movement of opponents to the east (any type and size bridges, railroad tracks, etc.).

The graphic and meteorological environment in which the operations were carried out was also adversarial. It was the first enemy against which the CSIR had to be measured and contradicted the Italian columns no less than the Russian rearguards. Snow, thunderstorms, flooded tracks that limited and made the walking of the infantry as much as the horses and motor vehicles. The conditions of time limited, to the detriment of, the activity of aerial reconnaissance that could have made precious services.

#### B) THE MANEUVER OF GORLOVKA

With the occupation of Stalino, operations for the possession of the entire Donets industrial basin could not be said exhausted. Stalino certainly constituted the center of the large mining area, which, with coal and iron deposits, the chemical and metallurgical industrial complexes, was of great importance for the needs of the war. But it was necessary to ensure its security with the occupation of Gorlovka, Rykovo and Trudovaja station. In this was the outlet of the Caspian pipeline; Gorlovka and Rykovo were not only important industrial and mining centers, but were also important in the operational sense as their possession gave Stalino greater security.

The Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army therefore assigned the three locations to CSIR as new targets to be won. This further use of Italian units, with such an important part in the great autumn offensive, was a very strong burden in relation to the fatigue conditions of the three Divisions; However, considering the general situation and the tactical convenience that justified

the conquest of these goals, General Messe asked of his fighters a new effort.

The Commander of the CSIR therefore ordered the *Celere* to occupy the area of Rykovo - Gorlovka - Nikitovka and the outlet of the Trudovaja pipeline; To the *Pasubio* to continue the eastward movement and to attest as soon as possible in Jekaterinovka area, Dylevka - Scelesnoje station, to protect the left side and rear of the *Celere*; To the *Torino* to continue walking to Stalino.

At the same time, General Messe ordered the establishment of retraining detachments, formed with elements of the Corps, for the maintenance of the streets and the protection of the communication lines by acts of sabotage of the partisans; Also ordered the dissolution of the Army Corps's motorized grouping, as the reasons for which it had been established was obsolete.

On the front of the German units with which CSIR operated and, in particular, in the III Corps sector, after the fierce opposition from the Russians and counterattacks that continued to develop intense and determined, the impossibility was outlined or at least the heavy burden, of conquering Rostov with frontal action. The Army Command then decided to turn the defenses for the left and for the execution of this purpose ordered the III Corps to pass on the defensive and to overthrow any enemy attack; To the XIV Corps to act with easterly direction Golodajevka and Schachty and then south to cross Rostov from the east; To the XLIX Corps to reach the Dmitrievka - Diakovo area to later secure the XIV Corps.

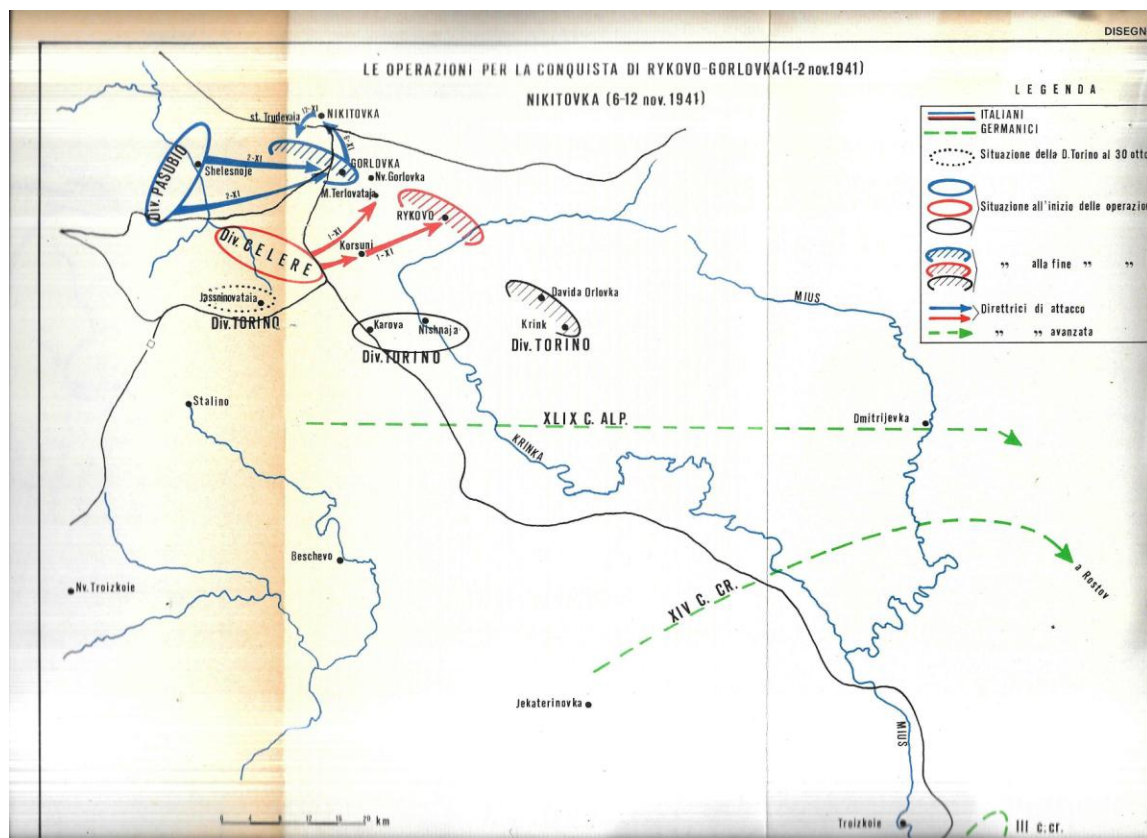
In this way, the XLIX Corps was inevitably brought to the south to shape its movement on that of the XIV Corps (*Drawing No 12*). Consequently, CSIR had to deal with the enemy forces on the southwest of Voroscilovgrad alone in order to prevent the occupation of Gorlovka and to threaten the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army's flank and rear.

CSIR's function, therefore, not only did not diminish any of its delicate attributes, but it was growing as important as it added to the difficult protection of the objectives assigned to it in relation to the tasks and objectives of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army.

The CSIR Divisions resumed the move and the *Celere*, on October 22, reached the front Jassinovataia - Avdeievka, respectively with the regiments of cavalry *Savoia* and *Novara*, after

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map 12



having to defeat, especially Avdeievka's strong rearguard, the next day the 24<sup>th</sup> could invest the front Skotovatoie - Panteleimonovka, where the adversarial reaction was increasingly consistent and aggressive.

Explorations made on the 25<sup>th</sup> by the cavalry and the XX Bersaglieri battalion, and news provided by prisoners, allowed to see the presence of a strong opposing enemy position consisting of units of three Divisions reinforced by many mortars and batteries of 76 and 152.

The numerical disproportion of the forces and organization that the Russians appeared to possess could have put into crisis the advanced Italian columns, and General Messe ordered the *Celere* to temporarily stay on the positions reached and to intensify the exploratory activity.

Meanwhile the Chiaramonti Column of the *Pasubio*, which on the 23<sup>rd</sup> passed by Griscino, went east and the 25<sup>th</sup> was occupied by Scelesnoje, after harsh combat against greater forces.

Soviet counterattacks on the 26<sup>th</sup> were rejected. Even on October 28 and 29, they were characterized by combat activity since the four battalions of the Chiaramonti column, passing from the temporary offensive to the resolute attack, with daring surprise action, after the settlement of Scelesnoje, also took possession of the mining center of the same name, Forcing his opponent to retreat without giving him time to destroy the factories and distilleries that remained intact in the hands of the men of *Pasubio* (4).

The decisive advance of *Celere* and the Chiaramonti Column of the *Pasubio* had laid the foundations for the investment of Gorlovka, a base that became even stronger with the arrival of the other two battalions of the 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Scelesnoje. For the attack on Gorlovka, however, General Messe could not count on any support

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(4) The column Chiaramonti (composed, as said, by the three battalions of the 80<sup>th</sup> Roma Infantry, commanded by Colonel Chiaramonti himself, and by a battalion of the 79<sup>th</sup> *Roma* infantry) had marched and fought continuously for twelve days; Had repeatedly fought an aggressive opponent and well-equipped with weapons and means, had captured a thousand prisoners and a remarkable plunder of weapons and mortars; He had occupied part of the important site for the development of operations and the task of protecting the flank of the *Celere*. His success was the fruit of the momentum and audacity with which his infantries operated, which disoriented the opponent, giving him the feeling of being faced with overwhelming forces. The behavior was praised by the Commander of the CSIR.

from the German lateral units as the XLIX Corps had already begun diversion towards its new targets to the south and the 17<sup>th</sup> Army was still too far behind to be able to make its presence felt.

Of the *Torino* Division, the Commander of CSIR could not have been there for a few days because it was still in motion (5).

General Messe's concept of maneuver was therefore intended to attack and conquer first goal of Rykovo with the *Celere* Division and subsequently invest the Gorlovka town and industrial center with frontal action from the West by the *Pasubio* and with a wrap-around maneuver from east to southeast with the same *Celere*.

In the expectation of bringing forward their own artillery, which had remained in the mud, and in order to maintain contact with the opponent and possibly identify the forces, the *Celere* and *Pasubio* Divisions pursued an intense exploratory activity that confirmed the presence of the Russian Divisions 74<sup>th</sup>, 262<sup>nd</sup> and 296<sup>th</sup> as well as other units belonging to Soviet regiments 55<sup>th</sup>, 56<sup>th</sup>, 62<sup>nd</sup> and 105<sup>th</sup>.

The attack against the positions occupied by these units began on November 1, when the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri daringly surprised and overwhelmed the Russian defenses of Rykovo's industrial district and occupied the city at nine (see *Drawing No. 12*).

On the same day, the *Torino* set off again and was on the Krinka river in the area of Im. Karova - Korsuni, to protect the south side of the *Celere*.

The most of the battle for the conquest of Gorlovka was instead fought by the two regiments of the *Pasubio* (see *Drawing No. 12*), invested from the west by the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry and from the south by the 79<sup>th</sup>. The fights, which began in the suburbs of the city, took place in the maze of the streets, fighting house to house-style clashes, against Soviet regulars who fired with automatic weapons from the windows and against the partisans who were attacking the rear of the units as they penetrated the town. On 2 November, the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry occupied the northern part of the city and 79<sup>th</sup> the south, while a column of the *Celere* (*Novara* lancers) competed to southwest action.

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(5) On 30 October, *Torino* concentrated in the area of Jassinovataia as a reserve of the Army Corps. It had covered the Dnieper from then, under the conditions that were said, over 300 kilometers on foot; Added to those of the stages from Falticeni (Romania) to the Dnieper, amount to some 1,400 kilometers.

Expelled from Gorlovka, the Soviets focused on Novo Gorlovka and here, stuck in robust buildings, supported by small and medium-sized artillery, continued their tough resistance. It was therefore necessary to eliminate any adversary presence in that area and to secure possession. The operation was entrusted to the 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry, which, flowed into Gorlovka, had directed without delay to overcome the reaction of the Russians.

Meanwhile, on 2 November, the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army Command had ordered CSIR to advance a strong unit to the line Tschjstjakovo - Debalzevo - Armejskoje to protect the left flank of the XLIX Alpine Army Corps south-east, in operations to conquer Rostov. CSIR at this point was therefore in the situation of having to:

- Completing the achievement of its objectives, with the occupation of Nikitovka (north of Gorlovka);
- ensure the possession of areas between Rykovo and Gorlovka;
- Secure the left wing of the XLIX Corps.

Faced with such requirements, the contingent reality was that the cavalry regiments had been withdrawn from the front line and started to the back area due to the serious state of decay and by the death of horses. It was indispensable, too, to remove the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri from the line as soon as possible to form a motorized grouping available to the Army Corp Command.

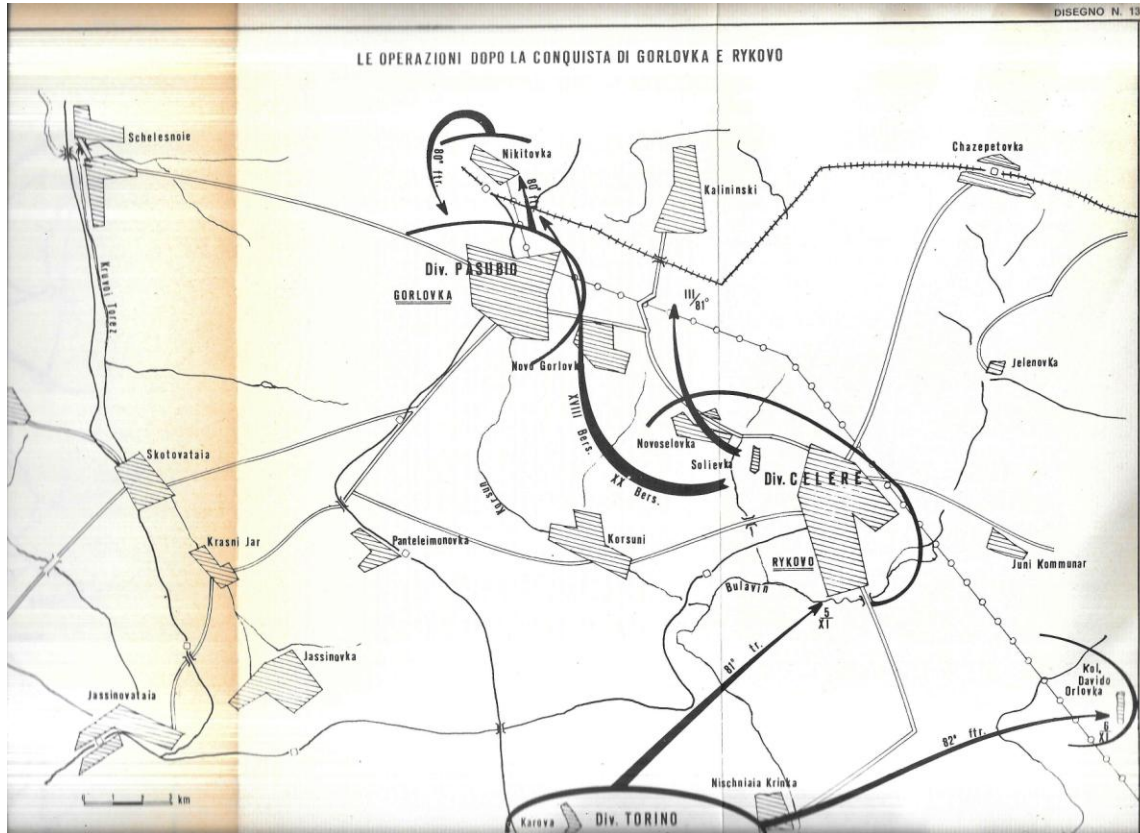
From such a state of facts came the decision of the Commander of CSIR to:

- to give the *Celere* a *Torino* Infantry Regiment, the 81<sup>st</sup>, to replace the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri;
- left behind at Kol. Davido Orlovka the 82<sup>nd</sup> Infantry of the same *Torino* to secure the flank of the German XLIX Corps;
- to acquire the entire area interposed between Gorlovka and Rykovo with a combined action from the west and the east.

On November 5 (*Drawing No. 13*), the 81<sup>st</sup> infantry, following the orders of the Commander of the *Celere*, arrived at Rykovo with two battalions, dispersing the III to Solievka, between Rykovo and Gorlovka, to protect the large space existing between the *Pasubio* and *Torino*. On November 6, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Infantry occupied Kol. Davido Orlovka and stood there to protect the left flank of the XLIX German Alpine Corps,

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map 13





threatened by thrusts from large Russian cavalry units coming from the north. With a firm offensive attitude, the 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry drew on itself the activity of much of the enemy formations, thus relieving the pressure they exerted on the left side of the Corps.

### C) THE OFFENSIVE OF NIKITOVKA

The 79<sup>th</sup> infantry operation on Novo Gorlovka could not be developed because new needs to be resolved with priority had in the meantime manifested on the left of the CSIR deployment.

The 80<sup>th</sup> infantry, in fact, occupied Gorlovka, had gone straight to the north to end the action on the last goal assigned to him, namely Trudovaja, the terminal station of the Caspian Seaway. However, near Nikitovka was attacked on the right flank by strong enemy units. It was almost the entire 74<sup>th</sup> Russian Division that, identified the wide solution of continuity (equal to 40 kilometers) existing between the Italian Corps and the 17<sup>th</sup> German Division, was quickly and firmly decided on the extreme left wing of CSIR.

From this beginning comes the battle of Nikitovka, which, among other events, lasted until November 12.

The 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry was in front of the enemies thrust and able to get the better of his initiative and drive him back. Along with the failure of their purpose, the Russians had to announce the destruction of an entire battalion and heavy losses for the other forces simultaneously in the fight. So on November 6th, the 80<sup>th</sup> entered Nikitovka, occupied it totally and prepared it for defense. Since the whole thing seemed clear, however, that the Russians would return soon to the attack and, in fact, set up large forces supported by numerous artillery, they attacked again and invested the the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry especially on the wings. The Russians at all costs wanted to envelop the Italian regiment and destroy it.

The magnitude of the forces employed, the activity carried out, the aggression with which the Russians attempted to implement such a plan, expressed the belief that they had now assumed a defensive counter-attacking attitude and tactically favorable positions they were able to counterbalance effectively to get around the left wing of CSIR and fell on rear and on the roads of communication.

The presence of the Russian Divisions 74<sup>th</sup>, 262<sup>nd</sup> and 296<sup>th</sup> was confirmed by various sources, and it was established that the opposing units assembled three infantry regiments each, in the face of the binary formation of the CSIR Divisions. One of the Soviet divisions, It was considerably strengthened and the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry had more than three times more force against itself, so that the situation was every bit worse. The objective examination of this situation required the need to restore without delay the continuity of the deployment and therefore to immediately return the Chiaramonti column on the line Gorlovka - Rykovo.

The firmness with which the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry led to its tenacious resistance could not, however, deceive that it could have lasted much longer, bearing in mind the Russian preponderance of men and the means. In addition, the regiment, now isolated, had the ammunition rationed, began to lack food, so much that it had to consume the flesh of the mules killed in combat, and lacked water. Under these conditions, the regiment held its front against the besiegers for five days.

The task of unlocking the 80<sup>th</sup> from the dangerous situation in which it was placed was entrusted to the *Celere* Division (the *Pasubio* Command had not yet been able to connect with his regiment) that acted immediately with the available forces, that is to say with the 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry and part of the *Navara* Lancher regiment. The I and II/79<sup>th</sup> were to attack the Rykovo - Gorlovka highway towards the railroad with the objective of Mog. Dlinaja - Mog. Gossuduref; the III/79th act astride the highway of the Gorlovka - Nikitovka to implement the connection with the I/80<sup>th</sup>; Novara Lancers form a defensive side, facing east, ahead of Novo Gorlovka. But the Russians held it hard and with a violent reaction of fire stopped the attack. They were therefore determined to keep the positions reached and to strengthen the mass of attack with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri (less the XXV battalion engaged in Rykovo's positions) and III/81<sup>st</sup>. After two more attempts to release the 80<sup>th</sup> from the "Siege of the Soviets, the evening of November 11<sup>th</sup> the situation remained unchanged.

Resumed on the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup> with the participation of the 371<sup>st</sup> Fighter squadron of the CSIR, who, having moved from Zaporje to the Stalino airfield, had already given good help to the besieged, the action developed concordantly and firmly. But the momentum of the committed units broke against the front of the intense fire of the numerous machine guns of the adversary, placed on dominant positions.. In the attack the XVIII and XX Bersaglieri Battalions distinguished themselves, however, despite the support of artillery and

of aviation they could not reach Nikitovka. Only some patrols of the III/79th were arriving at this town, which managed to get material contact with the 80<sup>th</sup>. The Russians diminished the pressure and the Commander of the 80<sup>th</sup> this took advantage to make a rush. The attempt failed due to the heavy losses caused by the automatic weapons of the Russians who literally mowed the Nikitovka - Gorlovka highway. Repeated at dusk, the attempt finally achieves the hoped-for outcome; The whole regiment could be unleashed and returned, in favor of darkness and without harm, to Gorlovka bringing with him all the wounded and all his material.

The losses were very serious: in operations for the conquest of Nikitovka, there were 68 deaths (including 4 officers), 206 injured (including 17 officers) and 6 missing; In the operations to unlock the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry besieged in Nikitovka, the dead were 62 (including 5 officers), 347 wounded (10 officers) and 10 missing. The biggest losses were the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri with 44 dead, 22 injured and 10 missing.

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With the occupation of the industrial districts of Gorlovka and Rykovo and with Nikitovka's operation for the unlocking of the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry, the summer-fall cycle of CSIR operations ended.

Already since the month of October, on the Voltsctja, General Messe had represented to the Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army, via a German liaison officer, that once Stalino was reached the CSIR would not be in a condition to continue the operational effort beyond the basin of the Donez. General Messe therefore asked to know what the Command's intentions were about the future use of the Italian units. It was replied that the Italian Corps was part of a greater German unit and therefore had obedience as any of the Army Corps of the German Army.

The CSIR Commander, in turn, replied that he was fully aware of being a commander of the Army Corps at the operational dependencies of the German Commanders, but also representing the Italian Army and the natural guardian of his soldiers whose job he was to answer only in his country. From this duty, General Messe did not intend to deflect. He also communicated these intentions to the Armored Army Command through a German liaison officer, which also indicated the conditions under which CSIR could have

followed the German effort. These conditions were also communicated in writing to the Italian liaison officer at the Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army Colonel Chiusi - to submit to the examination of the Germans.

General Messe therefore considered it appropriate to make known to the Italian Supreme Command and made it on October 26 with the following "radio message". Which clearly sums up the whole question:

"N. 7346/Op. 26 October. Following serious logistical situation determined by bad weather and poor road conditions, but above all due to German non-compliance, even minimal trains did not arrive and very negligible direct contribution to food I asked at Army his intentions about CSIR employment after occupation industrial districts Stalino & Gorlovka. Received the following response: "CSIR assistance very much desired until reaching the Army end goal in the two hypotheses: 1<sup>st</sup> objective Stalingrad; 2<sup>nd</sup> objective of Majkop wells." So I have Colonel Chiusi, Army Representative, responsible for the logistical considerations necessary to enable us to fulfill our task by "radio" that carry in full:

"Colonel Chiusi No. 733 I/Op. - My wish is mine and my troops to continue to give full cooperation to Army. But further CSIR contribution to operations beyond Stalino and Gorlovka zone it is absolutely subordinate to practical solution and immediate Logistical problem here: First - immediate guaranteed trains turnout at Dniepropetrovsk with recovery those not arrived. Second - availability of train guarantees to Stalino just that line will be in operation Third - temporary supply CSIR of food at German Stalino warehouse until it is set up with our advanced base. Fourth: fuels availability in Dniepropetrovsk to ensure supply truck movement. Fifth: availability aviation fuel at Zaporozje & Stalino for advanced air transport base constitution means. Sixth: give a pause to press upon under the artillery, services, food supplies, ammunition, equipment, woolen garments, partly already in motion. For your guidance I add that battles "Pasubio" and many troops "Celere" division undertook in order to reach their assigned targets marched and fought with scarcity with no food and many soldiers are almost without shoes. Obviously these conditions can not continue, especially for incipient solidly winter."

“So much for proper information and to be certain that the line chosen accordingly thought this Command, so I can adjust accordingly.

General Messe”.

Instead, the situation required a CSIR effort far beyond its potential, but, to the indispensable requirements of a higher interest, its units had obeyed unreservedly and without exception,

After these last operations on Rykovo - Gorlovka and Nikitovka the state of efficiency of the Expeditionary Corps was, therefore, nor could it be, in the best conditions, so one imposed immediate action.

The fullness of the physical resources of the CSIR men had influenced the advance from Voltscija to the Donez industrial basin not only because of the depth of the rush and the resistance of the Soviets, but mainly from the atmospheric conditions and the environment in which it had taken place.

The distance, the adversity of the meteorological elements, the terrain, the continuity and the intensity of the fatigue and the discomfort, had subjected men, pack animals and machines to a much torment in which the symptoms of the crisis had long been known. This assumed a more contingent character as, at that very moment, the operational effort involved the logistical one, to carry on the footsteps the massive amounts of foodstuffs and materials that were collecting late, due to the failure of the Trains to Dniepropetrovsk.

Neither the advance of early winter allowed for delays. During the advance phases, it was even necessary to adapt the rail line to make it accessible to the vehicles, in the absence of trails, and then to use the shuttle because at least the most exposed units could have a minimum of woolen garments. Similarly, CSIR aviation had the greatest merit in supplying food, ammunition and materials of the most urgent need, as well as the evacuating of the wounded - in spite of the poor navigability - and the need to add to the use of the transport equipment that of the reconnaissance aircraft.

Services, cars, artillery were scattered everywhere, scattered for a depth of 300 kilometers, stranded in the banks of mud or painfully struggling in the mud to gain often only a few hundred meters a day; the logistical bases

now there were amplitudes of very difficult itineraries under normal and unsurpassed road conditions to the practical state of the facts. The condition of the kit and footwear is not good, the winter equipment is inadequate at the units (6), precarious the inflow of food and ammunition; Alarming the condition of the draft animals, inadequate the performance of the animal towing in front of the mass of the transport; Inferior to number, as well as being unlucky for environmental conditions, that of vehicles, which had already been significantly deteriorated and whose wear was increasing in geometric progression.

The advance from the Voltsetja to Rykovo-Gorlovka was an eloquent and admirable example of firmness of will, conscious disregard, devotion, the feeling of military honor, the emulation spirit.

At CSIR, however, it was indispensable to have a rest period, a stoppage of operational activity in order to recover its offensive capacity.

### 3. - OPERATIONS FOR CONSOLIDATION OF POSITIONS REACHED

CSIR's operational activity during the period 15 November to 15 December can be divided into two phases, in which the units of the Expeditionary Corps will consolidate the positions reached (November 15 - December 4) and in which the fighting of Ubescicce is located, while in the second phase (5 - 14 December), the units themselves are engaged in the offensive battle of Chazepetovka, which proposed to close the front and to secure the deployment of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army with the 17<sup>th</sup> Army.

After the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry was unlocked at Nikitovka, it was the Commander of CSIR's intention to remove the salient held by the Russians between Gorlovka and Rykovo for a proper correction and stabilization of the front, as the tactical interest and a rational economy of the forces they imposed in that

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(6) The distribution of garments needed to complete the winter series took place after Donez's mining and industrial zone was reached (see Chapter II, p. 70, "Servizio di Commissariato" of the Monograph of the Historical Office of the Army Chief of Staff "I Servizi logistici delle Unità italiane al fronte russo").

moment. General Messe therefore demanded that positions be maintained, improved and consolidated, without prejudice to the exploratory activity needed to probe the opponent's deployment, to pinpoint the articulation and to keep the men of the opposite Soviet line continually alerted to tire them. In the relevant Order of Operation (*Document No. 37*), the responsibilities of the areas of competence of each unit were also laid down.

Meanwhile on the front of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army, the southern wing of Corps III and XV was attested at Tuslov and is about to invest Rostov from the north and west. The XLIX Corps had passed the Mius River with the mass of forces in the Diakovo area; North, the 97<sup>th</sup> Division occupied Artemovsk.

Facing the CSIR, on robust and profitable tactical positions, two infantry divisions with three regiments each; Small and medium-sized artillery of five groups; Cavalry units of the 38<sup>th</sup> Division. These forces maintained a permanently aggressive stance with numerous surprise attack attempts, daytime and nighttime action in force to test the consistency of the Italian deployment, repeatedly aimed at ever increasing in the void between CSIR and 17<sup>th</sup> Army, with the likely intention of creating the bases for a turning operation.

On November 17, the Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army ordered the Command of CSIR to exploit the success achieved by the south wing of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army in the area of Artemovsk, to continue the eastward, with the objective of Gorodisce - Scterovka, and to locate at least a Division in the Rassipnaia station area to give protection to the north side of the Army, from this location to the Gorlovka area.

The assignment of these tasks to CSIR reiterated in General Messe the conviction that the effort made by the three Italian Divisions had not been assessed by the German Command in its real proportions and because of the sacrifices it had cost. In essence, the German Command did not consider the serious situation, mainly in the logistical sense, in which the CSIR was located and gave the impression that it did not attach much importance to the repeated reports that General Messe had made in this respect. Starting in such conditions for a new offensive phase equated, according to the Commander of the CSIR, to face a failure or a true and proper setback.

For the Commander of CSIR, in fact, the operational framework was presented with these perspectives:

- a still fluid situation, on unfavorable positions requiring urgent consolidation, against a strong, threatening and aggressive opponent;
- greatly debilitating units in the workforce, both due to loss of combat and infirmity, and the repeated, uninterrupted division of the Services and the multiplication of secondary tasks;
- no efficient reserve at hand, as the only units unrelated were those of the *Celere*, with the exception of horseback regiments, which could not be used for the serious state of horses;
- wide openings between the wings of the Italian line and the German side units, equal to fifty kilometers on both sides;
- Much of the mechanical, artillery and trains, transport and services, units and large units, scattered over hundreds of miles of depth.

The Commander of the CSIR therefore informed the Army that in relation to the orders received on the 17<sup>th</sup> day, he could at best locate the part of the *Celere's* motorized units in the Rassipnaia area and move in the direction of Ubescicce, with the *Torino* Division forces, an attack with limited goals whose possible repercussions could have been exploited to bring the line of resistance at Chazepetovka defeat and thus eliminate the opponent's salient between Gorlovka and Rykovo. On November 18, after having briefly reported to the Army Command on CSIR conditions, General Messe decided to implement the proposed assistance to the Germans in the above-mentioned manner. He then ordered the *Torino* Division to attack at 09:00 the following day, November 19, with his right wing in the direction of Ubescicce, to fall later on the flank of the opposing positions.

The *Torino* Commander formulated an attack plan based on the concept of:

- pin the enemy with the left wing, that is with the 81<sup>st</sup> infantry, and force the predecessor sector of Ubescicce with the right wing, that is with the 82<sup>nd</sup> regiment;
- pivot later on hill 102.3 and, securing the flank to the east, falls with the 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry on the opposite side of the enemy deployment, facing the 81<sup>st</sup>.



### A) THE BATTLE OF UBESCICCE

Despite the series of difficulties that came to collect in the night and prepare for the attack, facing the north, the battalions of the 82<sup>nd</sup> and their respective 52<sup>nd</sup> artillery groups faced east to 8 kilometers of line, per hour per hour fixed the impact columns were ready to move, as were the units of the 81<sup>st</sup> assigned to the demonstration engagement function.

They acted:

- in the first stack, against Ubescicce, the I and II 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry, supported by groups II and III respectively of the 52<sup>nd</sup> artillery decentralized to the columns; In second echelon, to the left, the II/82<sup>nd</sup>;

- in the Rykovo area, units of battalions I and II/81<sup>st</sup>, supported by the group of artillery regiment on horseback and 52<sup>nd</sup> artillery battery;

- as artillery maneuvering the III group of the artillery regiment on horseback and I/52<sup>nd</sup> at the orders of the commander of divisional artillery.

On the Bulavin, a watercourse that intercepted the transit to artillery, divisional engineers had built in a few hours a fast walkway.

In the night the daytime temperature, which ranged from the beginning of November to 20 degrees below zero, had a sharp drop, and in the early hours of dawn the ground of the action, already covered with snow, was flooded with wide banks of thick fog, which concealed every contour. Without being able to watch the shooting, artillery units found themselves unable to develop effective interventions and had to suspend any firefight in the fear of hitting the friendly troops. These had left the starting positions with great momentum, although they had absolutely no reference points to maintain the desired direction and to implement the tactical link.

The 81st infantry units contacted the enemy placed on the ridge of hill 198.2, while the units of the 82<sup>nd</sup> eliminated advanced elements of the Russian line and fierce fighting on the Ubescicce resistance centers. Faced with these positions, solidly organized on three parallel lines with respect to the direction of attack and reinforced with the wide use of automatic weapons, mortars, small caliber guns, the units were forced to stop.

The I and III battalions of the 82<sup>nd</sup> attacked with the bayonet, they conquered the marginal houses of the inhabited area after a bitter struggle and found themselves at the Bulavin. However, here the attacking units were arrested in advance because of the frozen surface of the lake that the river forms near the village and whose southern shore was dominated by the ridges of the opposite shore, literally full of machine guns and enemy mortars.

Attempts to overcome that barrier, both frontally and maneuvering on the sides, did not succeed for the effective defense of the opponent. With the fall of the day the fighting faded, but the rifle fire lasted until 20:00, when, considering the impossibility of taking ground from the opponent, the regiment was returned to the starting positions.

Made bold by the discovery of free space ahead of him, the enemy prompted elements to test the consistency of the opponent, not saving attempts to attack in the middle of the night. It was everywhere dismissed with losses and between 03:00 and 06:00 on November 20, the regiment was again set up on the line from which it set off for the attack.

In order to comply with the order of at least one Division in the Rassipnaia station, the CSIR Commander ordered the *Celere* Division Command on the same day to set up a motorized column with: 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri, two 47/32 anti-tank companies, LXII Group of 105/32, III group 75/27 of the Torino, two batteries of 20 mm cannons, and to move with it the next day, in the area of Rassipnaia station, precisely with the said task, to protect, in constant contact with the XLIV Corps, the left flank of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army.

The *Celere's* units, on the other hand, went to the direct dependencies of the CSIR Commander, which was devoted to establishing, shortly after, a special formation. However, given the poor condition of most horses, they were only available for very limited use. By making the *Celere* motorized column available to the Germans, the CSIR Commander was deprived of the last modest reserve that remained.

But as the work of CSIR and the sacrifices accomplished could be useful to the general contingencies of the front in which it operated, it is evidenced by the praise (*Document 18*) that the Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army addressed on 23 November, As well as to their own units, even to the Italian Corps.

With the on-line introduction of the *Celere* motorized column, General Messe could point to *Torino* and *Celere* the same jurisdictions and responsibilities. He ordered *Celere* to be in the position to assume the responsibilities of the sector starting from the zero hours of November 26 and to implement, given the vast front, a block-line so as to ensure the best living conditions and recovery of units and to ensure the possibility of maneuvering to all the blocks that should, if necessary, have to mass on what they are supposed to do.

To facilitate the connection between the *Torino* and the motorized column of the *Celere*, the CSIR Commander assigned to the latter a squadron on horseback to disperse to Kol. Ivan Orlovka.

Throughout the period, CSIR's operational activity manifested itself through fire and counter-reaction to the repeated attempts of infiltration by the Soviets: with exploratory pushes aimed not only at recognizing and controlling the opponent's device, but also to keep the initiative, taking advantage of every opportunity to realize the occupation of places suitable for improving the Italian defensive line, inflict on the enemy constant harm and discomfort and make him feel the continuous assault of the adversary.

Such an intense and uninterrupted activity was to be added to the inconveniences caused by the increasingly intense cold and the exhausting labors which all the units were subjected to in the work for the defensive organization of the positions. This work was then made more difficult by the shortage of tools, the lack of reinforcement materials, and the thinning of the units.

And as the Italian side maintained aggressive attitude towards the opposing deployment, so the Soviet units were constantly present with their actions of disturbance.

These actions turned out to be particularly active on the *Pasubio* front and let the intention to turn the left wing of the CSIR, in which was also discovered due to the large gap that separated it from the 17<sup>th</sup> Army.

On 27 November, therefore, General Messe decided to extend *Pasubio*'s deployment to the west, thus ensuring the appropriate depth to the defensive flank by occupying the Scelesnoje station. For this purpose, a tactical grouping was established in the *Pasubio* subordinates, with the 63<sup>rd</sup> legion already assigned to reinforce the same division and deployed north of Gorlovka with a squadron of the *Novara* Lancer regiment and with a battery of the II horse artillery group.

The deployment of these units on the new front took place on 28 November.

Meanwhile, the military situation on the front of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army underwent substantial changes, which should be summarized as an indispensable premise for the further exposure of the events.

After the conquest of Taganrog, the advancement of the southern wing of the Army (III and XIV Corps), albeit through alternate events caused by the increasingly fierce resistance of the adversary and the growing logistical difficulties, however, continued towards the goal of Rostov.

The maneuver converging from Tuslov to the south, by the XIV Corps, and from west to east, by the III Corps, having gotten the better of the enemy's tenacity so that on November 20 the III Corps could occupy the city. But it was a temporary success.

By quickly capturing the moment of logistical and operational crisis in which the Great German Units were located, the Soviets quickly organized a massive counter-offensive against men and means, which gave the Germans a real surprise.

The Russians unexpectedly spun their attack by launching into the battle 11 Divisions supported by a large number of tank and artillery units. With no reserves to enter into the struggle and lack of supplies, the Germans were severely beaten; They had to leave the city and retreat to the positions of the lower Mius where they organized themselves in defense.

The Russians' action did not stop at Rostov's recapture (November 29) but continued with a series of attacks that gradually extended from south to north, investing later on the fronts of the III and the XIV Corps, that of the XLIX and therefore of the CSIR, in an effort to find an easy way to penetrate and break through.

Despite the Soviet success, however, the situation on the front of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army remained uncertain and worrying for a few days, so much so that Hitler would force him to inspect the Great Unit to realize the situation.

Under the influence of these events, set aside the intentions of other offensive actions, considering that the winter had already begun, and with extraordinary rigor, the German Command finally decided to give way to the winter arrangement of the Great Units.

Thus, in the Donez basin they were forced to stop not only the CSIR, as one month earlier General Messe had proposed, but also the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army itself.

## B) THE OFFENSIVE OF CHAZEPETOVKA

(See Drawing No. 14)

### DEPLOYMENT OF THE CSIR.

As of November 30, CSIR, located between the 17<sup>th</sup> Army, north, and the XLIX German Corps, south, was deployed from Scelesnoje station to Rassipnaia station with:

- the *Pasubio* Division, reinforced by the 63<sup>rd</sup> Legion, a *Navara Lancer* Squadron, a group of 105/32 and a 75/27 battery of the horse artillery regiment from Scelesnoje station to Mogila Pavlovskaja;

- the *Torino* Division, less the third group of 75/27 of the 52<sup>nd</sup> artillery, reinforced by a group by 105/32 and two groups of the horse artillery regiment, from Mogila Pavlovskaja to the Baskovski station;

- *Celere* motorized column, reinforced by a 105/32 group, group III 75/27 of the *Torino* and a squadron of the *Savoia* Regiment, from Baskovski station to Rassipnaia station.

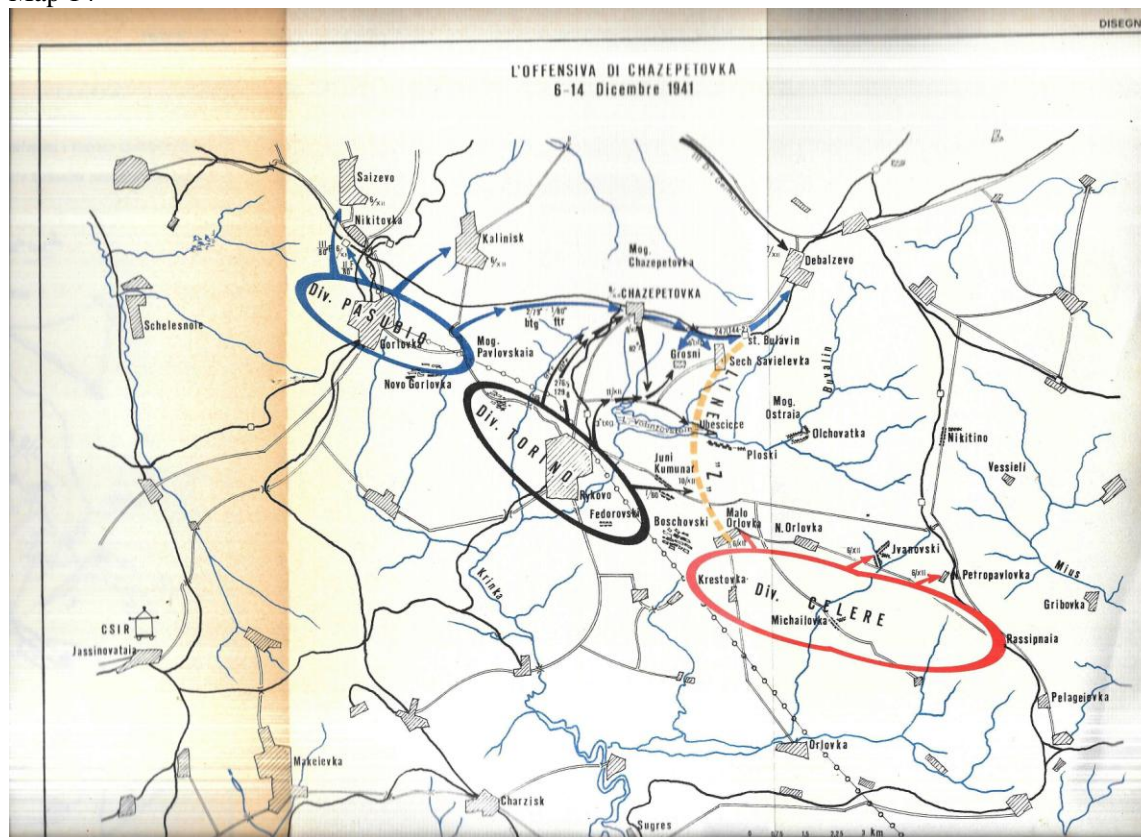
The aviation still had the mass of its aircraft in Zaporozje, with the exception of a fighter squadron, a observation squadron, and the LXXI Command group located at Stalino, where they also found the XIX group 75/46 and The 97<sup>th</sup> battery - 20 mm. cannon.

The tactical command of CSIR, since November 18, had established its headquarters in Jassinovataia, where the IV group of 75/46 and the 95<sup>th</sup> battery - 20 mm. guns were set up for the protection of the sky.

The deployment of CSIR at this stage of the operation was unfavorable since: the front had a width of about 50 km with a low density of forces; There was no natural obstacle to enhance the deployment itself, as in the XLIX German Corps which was attested at the Mius river; the line

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map 14



of the front ran inside the Gorlovka - Rykovo industrial zone of inhabited centers and mines, which caused a considerable dispersion of forces; Between the left wing of the CSIR and the 17<sup>th</sup> German Army there was a vacuum of about 20 km; There were no reserves to be employed mainly in the direction of the most likely opponent counter-maneuver (the two wings of the deployment).

A situation, therefore, in no way reassuring and fully contradicted by the need for a planned break, namely the transfer of CSIR into the rear, now urgently needed, and of which the units increasingly announced the immediate need. Instead, it was this same situation that required a new phase of offensive operations.

In fact, the increasingly threatening attitude of the adversary, confirmed news of its progressive strengthening with the arrival of considerable units in the area, the dangerous division of the small CSIR quota on the over-wide front, provided the exact measure of the indisputable the need for a cheaper, more consistent and safer deployment for the winter break.

In essence, there were no conditions for CSIR retirement on rest positions, and its divisions were therefore required to earn by force of arms, forward, the most valid operational possibilities.

The battle, which took the name of Chazepetovka, and to which it belonged to the 111<sup>th</sup> Germanic Division, the right wing of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army, lasted from 5 to 14 December and was the last offensive battle of 1941 taken by the Expeditionary Corps.

Given that the upgrading to the east would render the occupation of Scelesnoje station superfluous, General Messe dispatched the transfer of the 63rd Legion and the II Horse Artillery Group to the *Celere* sector as a reinforcement to the left of its deployment.

#### OF THE OFFENSIVE AND ITS SCHEMATIC LINES.

The offensive promised, as we have said, to close the front and join, with the Divisions of CSIR, the deployment of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army with the 17<sup>th</sup> Army.

In its general lines it was set on a pincer action of the right wing of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army, that is, of the 111<sup>th</sup> Division, and of the left wing of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army, namely CSIR. The one would move from northwest to south east, the other from west to

East. The common objective was the Debalzevo area (railway node and inhabited center were assigned to the 17th Army).

In order to harmonize individual operations and co-ordinate developments, the 17<sup>th</sup> Army would begin the offensive with a day's advance on the Italian Corps, who on the same day would co-operate with the artillery fire of the CSIR Command and *Pasubio*, with demonstrative actions of the *Pasubio* itself in the Gorlovka sector and engagement by *Torino* in the Rykovo sector.

#### OPERATIONAL CONCEPT.

The aim of the Commander of the CSIR was to reach the station of Chazepetovka, on which the Nikitovka - Debalzevo railway runs, with the main action of the *Torino* Division headed south from the north and with the action of many columns of the *Pasubio* Division West to East; Then proceeding, gravitating upwards, to the elimination of the resistances between the railroad and mid Bulavin, until you get a good terrain line in order to guarantee the best winter conditions for the units.

This purpose was subsidized by provisions designed to prevent possible counter-strikes of the enemy so that:

- the *Pasubio* Division had to keep the Gorlovka sector, with the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry, in conditions to take advantage of every favorable occasion to extend employment to the north;

- The *Torino* Division had to leave at Rykovo initially two reserve battalions with the task of countering any threats from the west and the east. When the need to close up the bulk of their operating units, those battalions would be replaced by a cavalry group of the *Savoy* and a battalion of the *Pasubio*.

Executive orders were given on December 3 (*Document 39*), followed on 4 December by some guidelines for action (*Document No. 40*). It was stated that the purpose of the offensive was to eliminate the enemy forces in front of them and to bring the *Torino* to the line called "Z", that is to say on the ridge between balka Bolschik and balka Sorrotschja, settling north with the deployment of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army in the Debalzevo area and in the south with that of the *Celere* Division.



## CONDITIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT.

The conditions of the environment in which the battle of Chazepetovka took place is described by General Messe:

"After the abundant snowfall of the previous days the serene came to life. The sky was swept away by the sunset that clouded the very small, impalpable ice crystals. The thermometer in the hours of light oscillated at less than 30° and dropped significantly in the evening approach and even more in the night. The engines had to be kept lit almost permanently; the weapons at each break of fire were blocked; The antifreeze oils and greases were not enough to protect neither the devices nor the men.

"On the honed crust of frost the pace was a continuous play of balance; the draft animals had to be supported by the drivers; the wheels slid and in the trails the headway became infrequent, the loads were disintegrating and overturned, fatigue degenerated into exhaustion.

"In the valleys, uncontained snow masses accumulated in which, by sinking to the chest, it was necessary to open the road. On the white and flat landscape the dark color of the uniforms stood out with the ebony highlight on porcelain. The lack of camouflage clothing made the defense of the defenders very effective, as it obliged our units to be long-lasting, face-to-face.

"Drinking hot drinks, they had to be ready to eat before they were iced; the hot meats were just removed from the cooking pots; the extraordinary dryness and rarefaction of the air congested the lungs; the hands clenched on the trigger and on the gun; the freezing torpor invaded the limbs.

"The infirmities suffered by infantry, most of them lacking the indispensable winter clothing, can be more easily understood than they do not.

## DEVELOPMENT OF OPERATIONS.

On December 5th, day x, while the right wing of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army began the target attack, for the day, the front Luganskaja - Jekaterinovka, the left wing of the CSIR was also moving. In particular:

- in the *Pasubio* area, substantial patrols of 79<sup>th</sup> and of the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry and *Novara* Squadron, preceded and backed by fiery artillery fire, were launched in exploration

towards the north, astride the Gorlovka - Nikitovka railway. They rushed to the east of the railroad in an intense fire reaction of mortars, automatic weapons and artillery, which cost some losses. To the west of the same line, the opposing positions, so far active, were found cleared so that a *Novara* patrol could go undisturbed to Petrovka where he linked with elements of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army;

- In the *Torino* sector, the infantry units of the 81<sup>st</sup> Infantry identified a consistent adversarial occupation at hill 198.2, with the head of the balka Oskad - Nekotimovka. Again, the defenders reacted with the burning fire of numerous automatic weapons, Artillery that produced empty spaces between the units in action.

Based on these probes, the attacking columns were directed that at 07:00 on the 6<sup>th</sup> they stepped forward with determination on their goals.

These goals were achieved, in relation to the difficulty of the ground and the opponent's reaction, in three successive phases.

*1<sup>st</sup> Phase (6, 7, 8 December).*

It sums up:

- in the attack of the *Torino* Division along Rykovo - Chazepetovka Ridge, astride the railroad;

- in the column of the *Pasubio* Division, composed of two battalions of 79<sup>th</sup> and one of the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry, with an attack from west to east;

- in the occupation of the villages of Sayzevo and Kalininsk by the remaining forces of the *Pasubio*.

For the *Torino* attack, the Commander of the Division had decided to act with the united forces in order to maintain, in the course of action, the superiority of fire and impact on the opponent; He also wanted to reach the ridge of hill 128.2 and provide a starting point for the continuation of the attack to the goal and to secure the attack device by means of appropriate defensive backing.

As a result, he divided his forces into two columns and a reserve:

- *left column*: 81<sup>st</sup> infantry, two battalions (I and II), XXVI mortar battalions, an anti-tank company, a group of

Artillery on horseback, an engineer platoon and a flamethrower team. Attack goal: Chazepetovka, west of the station;

- *right column*: 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry, two battalions (I and II), III Horse artillery group, an anti-tank company, a engineer platoon, a flamethrower team. Attack goal: Chazepetovka, east of the station. The flank and rear were in charge of I/79<sup>th</sup> and a *Savoia* squadron group on foot, who moved one to Sofievka and the other to hill 102.3;

- Divisional reserve: consisting of three battalions and a squadron group (III/81<sup>st</sup>, III/82<sup>nd</sup>, a 79<sup>th</sup> infantry battalion and a *Savoia* Cavalry squadron group).

As for the artillery, in addition to the two detached horse artillery groups, they were attached to the 82<sup>nd</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry respectively II and I/52<sup>nd</sup> respectively. The LX cannon 105/32 construed a mass of maneuver.

At the two columns of *Torino*, the Russians had opposed the 95<sup>th</sup> Soviet Guards, a choice and fresh unit (which had come in line a few days earlier), consisting of three battalions, in addition to two or three special companies and two cavalry squadrons. These well-equipped, abundantly equipped, automatic and mortar units supported a well-organized defensive arrangement, favored by the shape of the ground. They were therefore in the best conditions to face the attack of the Italian units.

The first battalions, I/81<sup>st</sup> and II/82<sup>nd</sup>, had in a short time had jammed by the cold the mechanisms of almost all the automatic weapons and the 45 mortars and could only fire with rifles and mortars of 81, the only weapons that can work.

However, the left column (81st infantry) also reached the ridge of hill 129.8, but was made a target of convergent fire coming from the ridge of hill 128.2 and Nekotimovka's town, was forced to stop.

It was necessary to set up a maneuver that arrived at the desired result because the II/81st overcame the obstacle on the left and reached the head of the watershed north of hill 128.2. At that point new enemy fire centers revealed in depth forced the units already well-trying a new stop. This was taken advantage of to overtake of the first echelon battalion, which, upon dusk, set foot on hill 135.7.

The right column instead, after repeatedly attempting to open the passage to the right of the above said hill 128.2 was obliged to desist and to oppose the insisting counter-attacks of the Soviets.

The arrival of darkness would have forced units to stop before they could reach an inhabited area. There was talk of spending the night in the snow, and with that temperature, it would have been a useless sacrifice. The Commander of the CSIR therefore recommended to the Commander of the Division to withdraw the columns in areas where they could be accommodated. Thus, the 81<sup>st</sup> infantry settled in the village of Verovka and the 82<sup>nd</sup> placed in the area of Volinzievo, south margin of Nekotimovka.

Though it was not possible to achieve the goals of the day, the action had made it possible to identify the most profitable direction for penetration into the opponent's positions; and it was identified with what the 81<sup>st</sup> infantry had followed to the west of the railway Rykovo-Chazepetovka. The Commander of the Division therefore decided to advance both columns in close contact with each other, while at the same time replacing II/81<sup>st</sup> and II/82<sup>nd</sup> with battalions of the divisional reserve.

On the same day:

- *Pasubio* had settled north of the occupation of the settlements of Sayzevo with III/80<sup>th</sup>, Kalininsk with III/79<sup>th</sup>, of the Nikitovka station with the II/80<sup>th</sup> and of the Novo Kajuta ridge with II/79<sup>th</sup>;

- *Celere*, with daring reconnaissance of great patrols, and overcoming various adverse reactions, had gone to occupy Novo Petropavlovka with the Bersaglieri motorcycle battalion, Kol. Ivan Orlovka with LXIII battalion of the militia and Ivanovskij with the XVIII Bersaglieri battalion.

With orders issued by the Commander of the CSIR on the evening of December 6:

- to the *Torino* Division was assigned the task of resuming the attack at 07:30 with the objective line "Z";

- to the *Pasubio* Division, the Command of the 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was taken away, two battalions, in addition to the one formerly mentioned, and a 75/27 group, with the task of making available to *Torino* and aiming for the Chazepetovka station to act on the rear of the enemy's position facing the 81<sup>st</sup> infantry;

- the remaining forces of the *Pasubio* had to keep at the point of being solicitously employed;

- to the *Celere* was entrusted with the task of intensifying the exploration on Kumschazkij - Ploskij - Kurgan Ploskij.

At 07:30 on the 7<sup>th</sup>, the 81<sup>st</sup> and the 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry were again on the attack; Proceeding side by side and closely connected to Balka Oskad, re-invaded the enemy with the effective support of the artillery and made the conversion eastward to Chazepetovka. The last admirable opponents were eliminated at night in two groups of houses located three kilometers southwest of Chazepetovka, where the columns settled to spend the night.

The 79<sup>th</sup> infantry, having reason for the resistance of some regular units and partisans, occupied the settlement of Novo Kajuta.

At Chazepetovka entered, a mixed column of infantry and engineers, at the orders of the commanding officer of the divisional engineers of the *Torino*, deployed on the Rykovo - Chazepetovka road with the aim of clearing the highway from the mines placed by the enemy; but still solid defenders on the right side of the sector, namely on the line Nekotimovka - Sofjno Rajevka - Ielenovka, led the detachments with a burning fire that obliged them to delay the unblocking of that road.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> took over the movement on Chazepetovka that the opponent tried unnecessarily to break and slow down. Overwhelmed by the tenacious resistance, the 81<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry joined with 79<sup>th</sup> that, after supporting a lively battle with enemy rearguards, occupied the town two hours later.

Mid-patrols were linked to the Germanic division that had occupied Debalzevo. However, between Rykovo and Chazepetovka, an opposing defensive complex dominated the Nekotimovka - Sofjno Rajevka - Jelenovka.

The addition of the *Torino* and the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry in the area of Chazepetovka concluded the first phase of the action that was protracted for three harsh and bloody days, against well organized and protected defensive positions and on which, probably, the Soviets, meant to winter.

## *2<sup>nd</sup> Phase* (9, 10, 11 December).

With the conquest of Chazepetovka, the center of gravity of the deployment had moved eastward, and Gorlovka occupation was therefore unnecessary. Thus, the same evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> General Messe ordered:

- to the *Pasubio* Division to move to Rykovo, in the southeast area of the railway;
- to the *Novara* squadron, reinforcing the *Pasubio*, to return to his regiment.

General Messe also held that on the 9<sup>th</sup> the *Torino* Division completed the occupation of the "Z" line, eliminating the remaining resistances still existing in the Rykovo area.

The 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry was supposed to remain in Chazepetovka at the disposal of the *Torino*, with a bond of employment.

The *Torino* Commander, on the basis of the orders received, therefore planned to:

- move with two battalions of the "infantry" to the line "Z", contacting the Germanic units at the Bulavin station;
- Eliminate the opponent's defensive complex Nekotimovka - Sofjno - Rajevka - Jelenovka by the combined action of two columns: one constituted by two battalions of the 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry, proceeding from the north; the other, at the orders of General De Carolis, Commander of the Divisional Infantry, consisting of the II/81<sup>st</sup>, I/79<sup>th</sup> Battalions, two batteries of the I/52<sup>nd</sup> and II/52<sup>nd</sup> artillery, oriented in favor, and a flame thrower unit from the south.

At 08:00 on the 9<sup>th</sup> the columns set in motion, hindered from the beginning by the violent reaction of the Soviet strongpoint garrisons. With the flamethrower's intervention, the 81<sup>st</sup> rejected the opponent's action by staying at night in the railway signal tower area, two and a half miles east of Chazepetovka.

As the 82<sup>nd</sup> descended to Chazepetovka on Sofjno Rajevka, the De Carolis column inverted the town of Volinzievo north, taking it over and moving towards the basin of Sofjno Rajevka and Jelenovka to occupy it in cooperation with the same 82<sup>nd</sup>. But his impulse was hindered by the effective host organization of the closing ridges and dominating the basin and by the tenacious will of the defenders. These, faithful to the delivery of resistance to annihilation, were able to slow down and make the movement of Italian columns tedious, but not to arrest him. Flushing the enemy house by house while still paying a high blood price. CSIR infiltrates the dwellings of Nekotimovka and Sofjno Rajevka, where they settled down shortly before sunset.

The following morning, 10 December, the battle went back to the northern sector where the 81<sup>st</sup> infantry was violently

counterattacked and threatened on the left flank by strong enemy infantry formations; On the right flank by impetuous cavalry charge, one and the other promptly repressed by the timely intervention of batteries and mortars.

The struggle in the Jelenovka basin was no less tenacious where only little progress was possible. Even in that area, the Russians defended with fierce tenacity.

As the offensive operations proceeded to this end, the CSIR Commander decided to make some changes to the deployment in order to increase its reliability. A weak and particularly sensitive point was that of the vast continuity solution between the left wing of the *Celere* Division and the *Torino* right wing in attack. On the same day, therefore, a battalion of the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry, departing from Rykovo, occupied Vesseneli and settled there by connecting with the *Celere*.

With this measure the second phase of the offense was exhausted. On the 11<sup>th</sup> the units were stationed on the positions reached.

The action taken here showed unitary, though tiring and conflicting development in the north; Fragmentary and more expensive development in the southern part where the watershed, the numerous mines, the many inhabited, transformed by the adversary into centers of very active reaction, caused the units in attack extremely serious difficulties. Even the fog of those days hindered the shooting of artillery and made the task of the infantry more difficult.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Phase* (12, 13, 14 December).

In order to secure the most energetic impulse to the final phase of the battle and to shorten the time for the solution of the struggle, the mass of the artillery of *Pasubio* was transferred to the *Torino* Division. Towards noon on December 11, the CSIR commander handed out orders for operations of the 12<sup>th</sup>, which included the following tasks:

- *Torino* Division, reinforced by the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry: resume the target attack with the line "Z";
- *Pasubio* Division:
  - To reinforce the day for the next day's action, the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry with I Group of the divisional 100/17 and a battery of the 105/32 group;

- assign an artillery share to the battalion located at Vessieli;
- deploy the remaining artillery so that you can effectively intervene in the field of Ubescicce - hill 296.6;

- *Celere* Division: Explorations across the front, intensifying it on the right wing;

- Aviation: Protect *Torino*'s attacking columns with fighters and recon the positions ahead of the *Celere* sector.

The following columns therefore constituted:

a. *North column*, at the orders of Colonel Biasioli, Commander of the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry, formed by two battalions of the 79<sup>th</sup>, by a battalion of the 80<sup>th</sup>, by two battalions of the 81<sup>st</sup>, the XXVI mortar battalion, a 105/32 battery, a engineer platoon and a flamethrower team. Task: Secure firmly on the ridge between hill 144.2 and hill 187.9 (Mogila Ostraja) and take the connection to Bulavin station with the Germanic units of Debalzevo;

b. *Central column* at the orders of Colonel Fioravanti, Commander of the 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry, composed of two 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry battalions, the III group horse artillery, II group 52<sup>nd</sup> artillery (less one battery) and a flame squad. Task: to complete the conquest of the north ridge of the Jelenovka basin and the stretch between the east margin of the village and hill 114.3 linking with the north column at hill 187.9;

c. *South Column* at the orders of Maj. Buglione, Commander of the II/81<sup>st</sup>, constituted by the same battalion, by the II/82<sup>nd</sup>, by a 52<sup>nd</sup> artillery battery and from a 52<sup>nd</sup> battery. Conquest of the south ridge of the Jelenovka basin to reach the southwest from the inhabited area itself to the eastern edge.

General De Carolis was entrusted with coordinating the actions of the central and southern columns.

The deployment of opposing forces on the 11<sup>th</sup> included:

- the 360<sup>th</sup> and the 76<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Division, deployed on the railway between Chazepetov and Debalzevo;
- the 95<sup>th</sup> Guard Regiment located in the Grosnij - Jelenovka area.



On the same day, however, the 360<sup>th</sup> was replaced by 261<sup>st</sup> infantry, three battalions and four small and medium-sized caliber pieces. In the Jelenovka area, however, the 105<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was re-established, reinforced by a cavalry squadron.

On the morning of December 12, the columns moved toward their targets, restrained by a thick curtain of mist that forced the commanders to advance with the aid of the compass.

The North column had the battalions I/81<sup>st</sup> and III/79<sup>th</sup> in the first echelon, the III/81<sup>st</sup> and II/79<sup>o</sup> in the second echelon. Divisional and sector reserve: I/80<sup>th</sup> in Chazepetovka.

Putting his stride under the violent artillery and mortar fire of the defenders, the battalions of the first group reached the area of Casello di Bulavin where they were assailed by two squadrons of Cossack cavalry suddenly emerging from the fog. The infantrymen reacted well to the surprise and after cruel melee the two squadrons were overwhelmed.

Meanwhile, two companies of the II/79th were led to Grosnij, but they were caught by strong opposing units and forced to stop. On the aforementioned positions, the column provided for the rest for the night.

Even greater disasters hit the central columns of the Jelenovka occupation, not only because of the fog, which did not allow visibility beyond a few meters, but also because of the broken nature of the soil and the flooding of the basin of the same name which had become absolutely impractical.

These conditions completely prevented the movement of the south column. So General De Carolis decided to move her north. So the column of Major Buglione, in cooperation with the central one (who in the meantime extended his maneuver with daring blows), succeeded in establishing itself on the ridge and mines in the north of Jelenovka (7).

The loss of the important locations of the Casello, the Bulavin and Jelenovka stations, almost put an end to the battle, as the enemy, who announced significant losses, renounced the entire sector, retreating his defensive line in the Olkovatka area.

After a few other small clashes, on December 13 and 14, the North Column occupied Grosnij and Savielevka and the central columns south of Jelenovka and Ubescicce.

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(7) In this action, while with the advanced units organized the decisive phase of the day, General De Carolis was mortally hit.

This ended, after ten days of hard struggle (8), one of the most rugged and complex warfare operations of CSIR, which had the main protagonists of the *Torino* Division and the 79<sup>th</sup> *Roma* Infantry Regiment of the *Pasubio*. Their struggle and expertise had once again been experienced by the irreducible stance both the stubborn determination of a determined, well-armed and capable adversary in the exploitation of defensive works and field organizations.

The purpose of the operation had been achieved. In fact, overtaken by the industrial buildings that were part of the line of resistance and now embedded in the rear, a topographic and tactically strong line was reached - the "Z" line - capable of providing protection and, behind it, possibility of hospitalization at CSIR for the duration of the winter. Another objective of the action was achieved, that is to carry out the joining with the 17<sup>th</sup> German Army in the Debalzevo area. At last, the front was nearly twenty kilometers away.

#### CSIR DEFENSIVE DEPLOYMENT AFTER THE BATTLE OF CHAZEPETOVKA.

The Italian units so far engaged in the battle were still completing the mopping up operations, when an Operation Order arrived from the Command of the 1st Armored Army (Document n.41), and it was agreed that the Corps would carry out another advance eastward to shorten the front and contact the IV German Corps in the Debalzevo area.

To it, the Commander of CSIR opposed the opposite, based on the following considerations:

- no further offensive action was possible in that situation of force, organization, fatigue of the troops without compromising inevitably the scarce and valuable residual energies;

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(8) The sharpness of the fight is eloquently affirmed by the losses suffered by CSIR units: dead: 135 (11 officers); Injured: 523 (31 officers); Missing: 10 (1 officer); Frozen: 915 (17 officers). Such losses incurred for 9/10 on the *Torino* Division. In particular: *Torino* Division, 115 killed, injured 435, 10 missing, 851 frozen [frostbite]; *Pasubio* Division, 15 killed, 48 injured, 61 frozen; *Celere* Division, dead 5, injured 40, frozen 3.

- the attack, to develop in a broken and insidious ground, would have collided frontally against strong, organized and dominant tactical positions, garrisoned by many forces;

- an offensive made in the sense intended by the 1<sup>st</sup> Germanic Army could not have disregarded a assist of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army, which from its positions of Debalzevo was in the best condition to maneuver on the side and on the enemy's rear to unlock the defiant Debalzevo - Nikischin.

- The front of the CSIR was better, for the winter shelter from the weather, than that indicated by the Army.

In this context, General Messe still made it clear to the Germans that the tactical-Logistics of positions for wintering in open terrain required availability at the hand of the building material such as timber, tools, heating stoves , Etc ..., and also required the construction of cabins, shelter, trenches, walkways, slopes, suitable for providing life and combat opportunities to the units.

The choice of winter positions was therefore strongly bound to the presence and availability of dwellings that would ensure comfortable accommodation and the closeness of communication routes that are definitely suitable for the transit of motor vehicles even during the winter season to ensure the continuity of supplies.

It is, moreover, likely that the German Command, in imposing the arrival of the Debalzevo - Nikischin line, had placed these considerations in the background and examined the problem by a unilateral and purely tactical solution; Seeing that the problem was only on the side of the shortening of the front, which would have undoubtedly been more robust.

On the other hand, they neglected that the line itself:

- developed in a poor environment of inhabited places and therefore with limited possibilities of shelter;

- it lacked rolling stock and therefore transferred all the complex work of supplies along impassable tracks and exclusively by pack animals, of which there was, among other things, a strong deficiency;

- it would have required a tactical effort disproportionate to the importance of the objective, with the dangerous risk that troops would be there

coupled with fatigue, in conditions of exhausted operational efficiency.

Based on these considerations, the Commander of the CSIR declared to the German Command to find the desired balance of conditions in the "Z" line, and proposed to the Command itself the need to adopt it. Meanwhile, CSIR units fitted with stability criteria and the line marked the axis of the resistance position. It took some time for the German Command to realize the validity of the General Messe's proposal; In the end, however, he approved the decisions of the Commander of the CSIR and did not insist further on the implementation of his initial order to push further the Italian Divisions. To confirm the validity of the proposal of Messe, a few days after a circular of the German Supreme Command confirmed the great importance of the inhabitants in the winter war and ordered the occupation and organization of strongpoints.

Thus, having the very tactical and logistical requirements to which he had to respond to the winter accommodation, and considering that due to the offensive action that the *Pasubio* forces had been able to gravitate on the Chazepetovka railway, the Commander of the CSIR remained the deployment of the Expeditionary Corps and entrusted:

- to the *Pasubio* Division, reinforced by the LXII group of 105/32 and by a group of horse artillery, the northern sector;

- to the *Torino* Division, reinforced by the LX Group of 105/32, the central sector;

- to the *Celere* Division, reinforced by the LXI group of 105/32 and the III group of the 52<sup>nd</sup> artillery, the southern sector.

The axis of the resistance position was as follows: Bulavin station - Savielevka - Ubescicce - Junyj Kommunar - Malo Orlovka - Ivanovskij - Petropavlovka - station Rassipnaia.

General Messe also stated that the defensive organization was to be based on the criterion of harmonizing the defense's upgrading with the need to give shelter to the units and also establish the strengths of the forces according to which:

- The *Pasubio* Division had to gravitate mainly on the left wing to secure possession of the defensive pinion of Savielevka - Bulavin Station and to secure a deep staggering depth to Chazepetovka;

- The *Torino* Division was to secure the defense of its sector with only one regiment, ceding the other to the Armed Forces reserve;
- the 1<sup>st</sup> motorcycle company, already assigned to *Pasubio*, the *Savoia* cavalry group, already assigned to *Torino*, and the *Savoia* cavalry squadron, already assigned to *Celere*, returned to organic dependencies.

The above-mentioned deployment and the responsibility of individual sectors came into effect at 16:00 of December 18, 1941.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE DEFENSIVE CYCLE IN WINTER

The summer-autumn campaign 1941 had been for the Germans under the sign of the best fortune and had represented a brilliant war period for the conduct of the operations, where initiative and superiority of the means had been as many impulse coefficients for the rapid achievement of success and its maximum exploitation.

Sacrifices, inconveniences, dangers, risks and difficulties of all kinds had been accepted and faced by everyone with the serene certainty of the imminent victory.

The Russian offensive on Rostov, for the first time, outlined the situation as it was in substance and which was no longer due to the will of a single potential ruler, the German one, but also in relation to an antagonistic force of unsuspected solidity and which showed resistance, at any cost, every shock and every insistent pressure. German defeat had not only revealed the lack of Germanic reserves immediately available, but had also demonstrated the Soviet Command's undoubted ability to conduct a winter offensive campaign with surprisingly well-organized and well-armed masses.

The boldness with which the Russians stalked to launch themselves into the great duel and the resolve with which they had dealt with and happily completed the first act of this campaign, Rostov, offered the clear feeling that winter would be very hard for the Germans and their allies. They, in fact, had to add the torment of an increasingly active struggle against an animated opponent, determined to exploit all the moral, tactical and political-strategic effects of the struggle he was fighting, as well as his unquestionable superiority numerical and psychological, the latter insists that he was working to defend his country.

Consequently, CSIR could not have a period of operational respite, but instead had to remain in the line with its already worn divisions after five months of march

and fighting, in precarious hygienic and sanitary conditions and without any prospect of change, given that the breadth of the front by its units and the need to secure the deployments had absorbed all the forces, including those to hold any reserves.

Such a situation was further aggravated by the wretched incidence of the terrible Russian winter season of that year.

The lack of high-profile events could perhaps lead to the attribution of a colorless appearance to the winter defensive cycle so as to suggest that, in the resemblance of the same local fauna, completely disappeared with the gradual fading of the frost, the front had fallen into lethargy. On the contrary, the struggle did not come to fruition, and in fact it was characterized, together with the prevailing military interest, by the intransigent protection of that minimum of material well-being from which the elementary conditions of physical life depended on, mined by a thousand pitfalls, renunciations, constraints and discomforts. It is enough to think about sudden temperature fluctuations, both in relation to the difference between the internal warmth of the shelters, about 10°, and the outside usually curbing at the least 30°, as well as the absolute value of the thermal tips that touched the 47° below zero. The blinding snowstorms are to be added to all this, the precarious possibilities of hospitalization, the pediculosis, the vitamin deficiency, the exhausting patrol services and all the rest, are all to be added, which, in short, digs with the hidden but inexorable assiduity both the physical body, with the inevitable reflections that were subjected to lungs, heart and kidneys, as well as moral vigor.

To influence the soul of the fighters were then the characteristics of the environment in which they operated, namely the despairing desolation of a flat and immobile landscape under the boundless snowy expanse; the massive material ruin caused by the passage of the war, the terrible human misery generated by the armed struggle, and finally the very mystery of the Russian soul and the inability to understand at least the superficial part.

These conditions were aggravated by the insatiable nostalgia of the Homeland and the Family, the thought of the great distance separating them from the fighters, the lack of news when the Military Postal Service was not working properly.

In all respects, therefore, with no response to the winters of the war on the Alps of the First World War, Russian winter acquired a primacy of particular hardness and severity, such that it constituted a rigorous screening for human energies,

physical, moral and spiritual, and an indisputable proof of firm nature for those who have passed it.

As a whole, the winter campaign 1941-1942 represents one of the most sour and difficult stages of operations at the Russian front, albeit under a resigned and unexpected appearance.

Although there is no decisive event in the CSIR sector, as in any other sector of the Army Group, the opponent never loosened his pressure, nor ours.

The military and the moral significance of the Italian contribution to the Russian front, even in the first defensive winter cycle, can be seen entirely in this statement.

Housed on the resistance position, mentioned in the previous chapter, the Expeditionary Corps was now facing vital tactical and logistical problems.

In order to ensure the units living conditions, it was essential to provide: adequate winter equipment; a food ration able to compensate for the dispersion of calories and to preserve the essential energies to the physical; sheltering in buildings, even for the most advanced units, being absolutely impossible to live outside of them.

The problem of winter accommodation had already been imposed, in all its gravity and complexity, since the early days of November, when the CSIR, with a profound leap of more than two hundred kilometers, from Voltsctja had penetrated the industrial zone of Gorlovka-Rvkovo. Then the tactical situation was evolving and the logistics in serious crisis as the base of Dniepropetrovsk was overly backward, the tracks totally impracticable, the movement of all types of motor vehicles and the railway line upset by the destruction work of the Soviets in retreat. They also stumbled with the German authorities on the number of trains running to Dniepropetrovsk's base, which was far less than agreed and more than indispensable to the most pressing needs of the Italian Corps.

To fully resolve these problems, the CSIR Commander imposed and set up an organic plan that in the logistical field was concerned: the immediate supply of winter equipment to all units, above those at the front; the urgent establishment of an advanced base in the Stalino area, so as to minimize supply lines, which



would have been seriously hindered by the winter season; the establishment of advanced stores of ammunition, ammunition and fuel at the divisions, to ensure the continuity of supplies when communications were interrupted by snow buffs; the complete supply of the necessary produce up to the first line, as the area was poor in local resources; the reintegration of warehouse equipment; the disappearance of warehouse fractions that had been disseminated from Romania to Dniepropetrovsk; the requisition of all the animal trails it was possible to find, to replace the vehicles in times of crisis of movement.

In the tactical field, on the other hand, once occupied with the "Z" line, the possession of naturally strong ground positions (which without departing much from the bases made it possible to achieve the most economical deployment, joining with the large Germanic flanking units), this was to give way to the execution of numerous and complex defensive works, because the resistance line supported by the inhabitants could assume consistency and continuity. To the solution of so many serious and burdensome problems, both in the logistical and in the tactical fields, they committed with stubborn will and unity of purpose all undoubtedly the men of CSIR. However, they failed to create a perfect defensive organization, but they did everything they could for their time and resources.

The crisis for a valid logistics arrangement of the CSIR came to its summit in November when, due to the distances from the bases and the road conditions, the huge transport movement had to be entrusted to a small number of vehicles, frost usually locked the mechanical organs.

Of all sorts of things, after the end of November, all the line units had a full set of winter garments, limited to the only a share of sentinels, patrols and scouts, and to all those men who, under various circumstances, had to be exposed to the weather.

Subsequently, the operation of the Dniepropetrovsk - Griskino railway, ensuring a certain regularity to the periodic flow of the supplies, allowing progressively implement the planned logistics program.

Already at the end of December, all soldiers in line and in the rear had a full set of winter items.

As far as the operating field is concerned, the organization was shaped by the following concepts:

- basing the organization of the resistance position on the dwellings;
- to gradually transform each inhabited area into the strongpoint, with supplies of food, ammunition, healthcare, so as to ensure its own logistical and operational autonomy;
- to carry out defensive work between a strongpoint and the other with excavation works, so as to give consistency to defense and avoid broad solutions of continuity;
- suggest the filling tracks with poles, to ensure traversability even during snowstorms.

## I – THE CHRISTMAS BATTLE

### A) SITUATION AND ORDERS

The most sensitive sector of the CSIR was that held by the *Celere* Division and not just because it was a junction area (with the XLIX German Alpine Corps) but also and chiefly because a breakthrough in that direction would have the enemy spread over the grand Charzysk highway, with the chance to reach Stalino, the most important goal for the shortest route and threaten the deployment of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army.

The breadth of the front of the sector was also disproportionate to the scarcity of forces available, and the reinforcement of the militia legion, assigned to *Celere*, did not greatly improve the situation.

In essence, with a mass made up of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment (3 battalions), which was considerably reduced in strength, two battalions of the militia and four artillery groups, it was necessary to secure a front of more than twenty kilometers.

The CSIR was then faced by two Soviet infantry divisions, some non-divisional units, an unspecified number of artillery pieces. On December 20, our aerial reconnaissance signaled a number of railway transports from the east and southeast, in addition to troop concentrations in the Tcernukino - Nikischin areas, corresponding to the sector of the *Celere* Division

and suture point with XLIX Corps. The new forces reported by aerial reconnaissance were constituted by another Infantry Division and a Cavalry Corps with three divisions.

In summary: unchanged situation on the front of the *Pasubio* and *Torino* divisions; three Soviet Infantry Divisions and a Cavalry Corps with Three Divisions, on the *Celere* Front.

The information service provided an imminent enemy attack in the direction of the junction between the Italian Corps and the XLIX German Alpine Corps. In fact, as was then found in the reading of an order of operation found after the battle of a prisoner officer, it was in the concept of action of the Enemy Commander: to strongly engage the right of the *Celere* Division; break into the center, between Petropavlovka and Novo Orlovka, aiming for Alexievo Orlovka; spread to the left of CSIR with the cavalry to the Krinka line.

The Italian Corps, as has been said, lacked reserves; however, the Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army had dispersed in the *Celere* sector a mass of counterattack consisting of the 318<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, a Paratrooper Regiment and an Armored Formation with 75 tanks.

On December 23, the Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army issued Operation Order No. 63, which, in anticipation of the enemy attack and in an attempt to impress upon the combat a unitary of conduct, constituted:

- a defense group at the orders of the Commander of the XLIX Alpine Corps to which the forces deployed in the *Celere* Division (which had to resist altogether) had to be placed;

- a counterattack group, at the orders of the Commander of the CSIR, with the *Pasubio* and *Torino* Divisions and other Germanic forces that did not come.

As a result of these provisions, General Messe on 24 December dispatched some guidelines (*Document n. 42*) to the Commanders of the *Pasubio* and *Torino* Divisions, referring mainly to their attention to the possibility that the enemy attack also extended to their respective sectors and drawing the summary lines for the individual counteroffensive actions. Counterattack was in turn divided into two sub-sectors: the right one, under the command of Colonel Aminto Caretto; the left one, under the command of Colonel Carlo Lombardi.

## B) THE RUSSIAN ATTACK

(Drawing No 15)

The impact of Soviet infantry, supported by tanks, started at 06:40, after 10 minutes of artillery and mortar preparation, on the far left of *Celere's* front, guarded by the 63<sup>rd</sup> Legion Tagliamento and later on the center and on the right held by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri.

It was the Christmas day and the adversary benefited from the festivity to more easily engage the minds of Italian soldiers.

At the same time, for demonstrative-challenging purposes, two cavalry squadrons and an infantry company attacked the advanced strongpoint of Vessieli on the *Torino* front. The immediate reaction of the garrison, the precise fire of barrage of artillery and the counterattack of a company, started by Junyi Kommunar, managed to curb from the beginning the thrust of the opponent who was then forced to retreat.

Meanwhile, in the *Celere* sector, the fight was furious. Overcoming the external defenses, the enemy spread unrestrained in the interior of the positions where some garrisons, completely bypassed, resisted to total annihilation.

Fractured in clashes of small units, the fighting continued until evening with duels that ended with hand to hand combat.

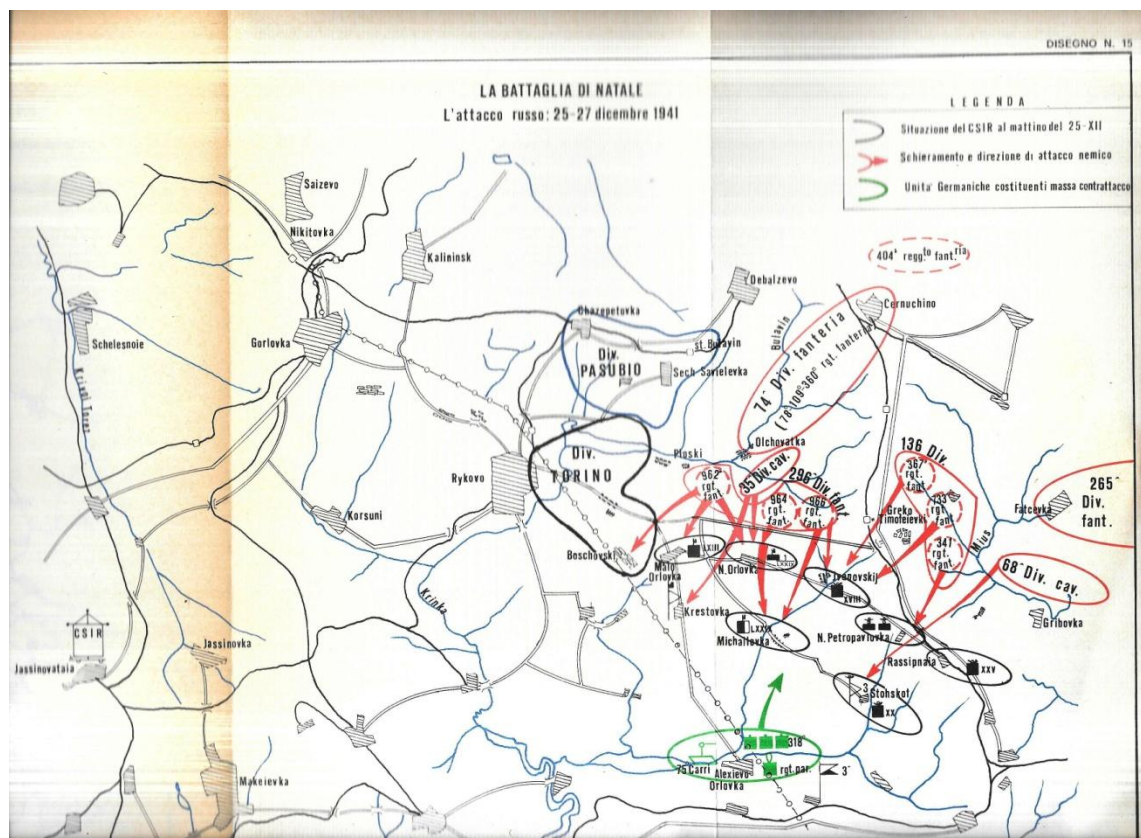
Two Russian battalions attacked Novo Orlovka, defended by a reinforced company of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Legion "Tagliamento", which had to surrender after a strenuous and heroic resistance and after all officers had fallen or were wounded.

The opponent occupied Novo Orlovka, headed to Krestovka whose garrison (63<sup>rd</sup> legion Command with a company of its LXIII battalion and a horse battery), in order not to be totally destroyed, fled to fight on at Malo Orlovka, a place that Russians considered as the "first decisive stage" of their Christmas offensive. Here, therefore, they committed themselves to fighting with particular violence, but could not have the cause for the valiant defenders, even for the contention of the contiguous units of the *Torino*.

The XVIII Bersaglieri battalion is strongly attacked at Ivanovskij by two Russian regiments and some cavalry squadrons. It resists in place by fighting for about ten hours along with the 5<sup>th</sup> horse battery, which, after exhausting the ammunition, continues fighting at close quarters alongside the Bersaglieri. At 06:00 the defenders are able to open a gap through the Russian units there

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map 15



encircle and to fall back on Mikhailovka, where there was still a fierce fight. Other Russian units attacked Stoschkovo; are rejected by the XX Bersaglieri battalion (reserve).

On the right are Petropavlovka and Rassipnaia invested by an infantry regiment of the 136<sup>th</sup> Russian Division and cavalry squadrons. The strongpoint of Rassipnaia garrisoned by the XXV Bersaglieri battalion does not give up; after a fierce battle the Petropavlovka stronghold falls instead, because it is invested by superior forces; was defended by the battalion of motorcyclists who after strenuous resistance is forced to fall back on the strongpoint of Rassipnaia.

While such fights on the *Celere* front are taking place, *Pasubio* units, and more particularly *Torino*, engage in combat the 74<sup>th</sup> Soviet Infantry Division to prevent them from moving against the *Celere*.

At noon, at last, the Command of the XLIX German Alpine Corps orders the counterattack to be commenced at 13:30. It will be launched from the 318<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Regiment and from a unit of the XVIII Bersaglieri battalion, backed by tanks.

The counterattack is divided into two columns: two German battalions and the Bersaglieri units point to Ivanovskij; the other battalion of the same 318<sup>th</sup> regiment goes to Petropavlovka.

The column pointing to Ivanovskij reaches the eastern part of the town; that instead of having to attack Petropavlovka, strongly obstructed by the enemy and the snow, after some progress it must return to the bases of departure.

At the fall of Christmas night, the situation is, in summary, the following: the Novo Orlovka, Krestovka and Petropavlovka strongpoints fall into the hands of the Russians; Ivanovskij for half recaptured; still resist Rassipnaia and Michailovka.

The Italian and German aviation could not carry out any activity due to the bad weather conditions.

On the edge of Ivanovskij's inhabited area, still occupied by two enemy battalions, it is placed with an indomitable will to retreat a rearguard left by the XVIII Bersaglieri battalion.

The Russians' action, though, with hard sacrifices, had been contained in general and the reaction had begun to re-establish the situation.

Indeed, on 26 December, the *Celere* was decisively on the counterattack together with the Germanic reserves with it operating. At the same time, the *Pasubio* engaged in combat the enemy defenses of the Bulavin - Timofejevskij height and was also part of the battle, maneuvering eastward, to fall

on the side of the Russian columns from the area of Olkovatka-Kurgan Ploskij in order to spread on the left wing of the *Celere*, south, in the direction of Krinka,

Units of the 318<sup>th</sup> German regiment together with the XVIII Bersaglieri battalion re-occupied Ivanovsky, except the northern part of the town. The battalions of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Legion, moving towards Novo Orlovka, were arrested by a violent attack of the enemy. The II German Battalion and the XX Bersaglieri battalion again captured Petropavlovka, but an enemy counterattack forced them to fall back on the starting positions. Even at Rassipnaia, the XXV Bersaglieri battalion rejected the repeated attacks of the Russians.

However, after two days of fighting, the powerful Soviet offensive had crashed into the back-breaking blow to the tenacious defenders, and at the dusk of December 26th, the situation could be reestablished. On Dec. 27, with just a few shots, the last enemy units were eliminated, and the CSIR units could again consolidate their positions without imminent threats.

### C) THE ITALIAN DISCUSSION (Drawing No 16)

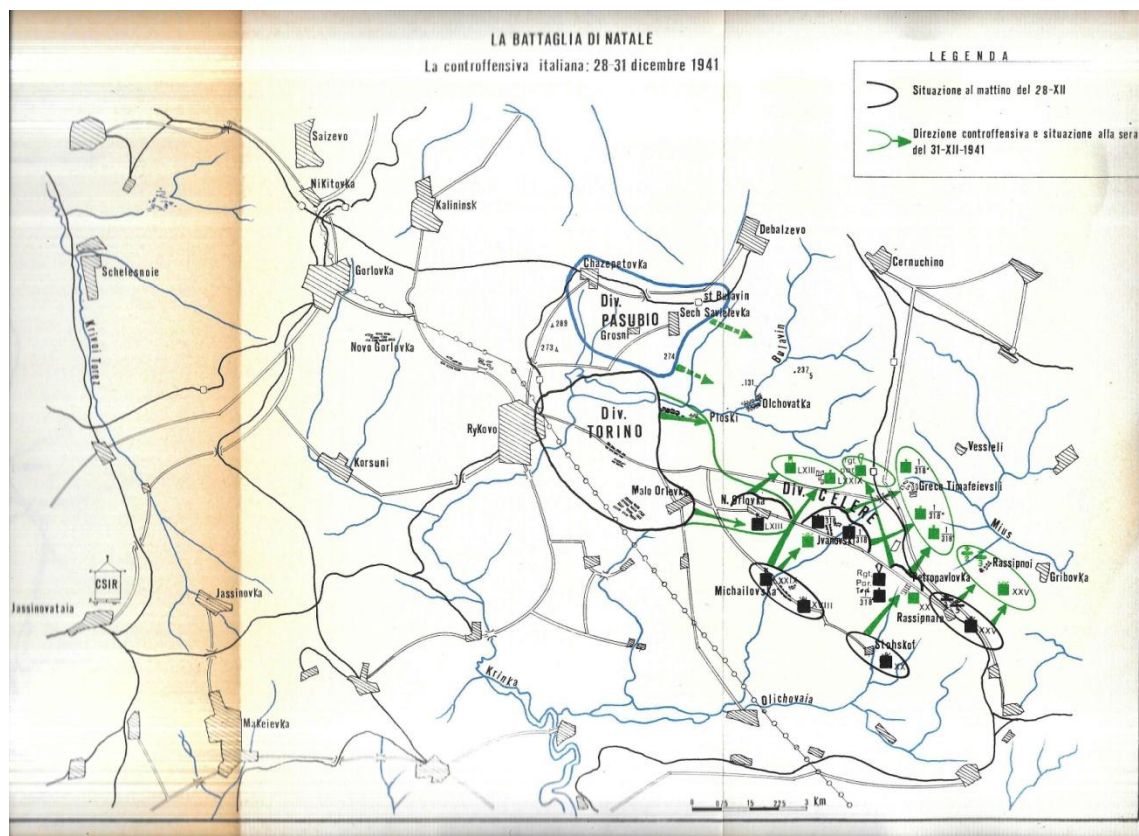
On the same day on December 27<sup>th</sup>, informed of the favorable countervailing outcome, the Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army ordered:

- to the XLIX German Alpine Corps to pursue the enemy along the Ivanovskij-Nikitino direction, until it is affirmed on the line Grabova - Nikitino included;
- to the Italian Corps to support the action of the *Celere* Division, initially attacking the Voroscilova line - southwest of Olkovatka; then further deepening the penetration in harmony with the progress of *Celere* itself, until it was established on the hills west of Nikitino.

As a result, the Commander of the CSIR ordered the attack on the 28<sup>th</sup> by assigning:

- the *Pasubio* Division, the Debalzevo-Ilinskaia attack sector;
- the *Torino* Division's sector of attack hill 237 - hill 290, a group of unnamed homes about 2 km west of Kikiscin station, with intermediate target Mogila Ostraja, north of the Bulavin middle and the sector hill 301 and hill 311.7.

## Map 16





The counter-offensive movement was characterized by two phases:

- the first, the 28<sup>th</sup>, in which the impetus and momentum of the attacking units succeeded in overcoming the adversary;
- the second, developed on days 29 and 30, during which the strong resistance and the violent counterattacks of the Russians prevented further progress, after harsh and alternate events.

The *Celere Division*, after the 28<sup>th</sup>, the resistance of the enemy who supported the same positions from which he started to attack, later occupied Rasinopnoj - Timofejevskij and the station 3 km south of Nikischin - Voroscilova.

The *Torino Division*, divided into two columns, the northern made up of the 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry occupied part of the Kumschazkij, Ploskij and Mogila Ostraja, and the southern one, made up of the 81<sup>st</sup> infantry, into the area of Kurgan Ploskij, bumping into a well-equipped line of trenches full of machine guns, mortars and cannons. Bravely the column was leaping to the conquest of the enemy positions, but when it had already taken over most of it, a violent counterattack of the adversary caught her on her flank and forced her to stop. Without however renouncing the achievement of the difficult goal - that the intervention of a share of the Russian artillery made it increasingly precarious - the tenacious infantrymen continued the fight until late in the evening, when, due to the need to shelter during the night, they had to retreat on Novaja Orlovka.

The *Pasubio Division* supported the attack of *Torino* and *Celere* with demonstration action, even though on the flat, snow-covered ground the movement of the units and even the isolated men was easily observed by the opponent who, consequently, responded with the utmost effectiveness.

With the first shot, the Soviets returned to attack with the intention of resuming lost positions. The December 29<sup>th</sup>, therefore, was marked by violent actions in every direction.

On the front of the *Celere*, the enemy launched attacks columns from Striukovo, Vesieli, Nikitino and Balka Olkovatka, but all had to return to the starting positions. One only succeeded in establish itself on hill 331.7, where the German unit that had been garrisoning it was forced to withdraw. It was this, a special topographical height

and tactical importance, and this justifies the exceptional agony with which it was invested and the obstinacy with which it was defended. The number of attackers, above all, far superior to that of the defenders, had had supremacy here. The Soviet success was, however, completely transient, since December 31, an attack of the XVIII Bersaglieri battalion, supported by Germanic tanks, returned the position to the Italian front in its entirety.

Another target of the Russians was represented by Voroscilova, a modest group of houses, firmly defended by the LXIII CC.NN battalion and then also by the LXXIX, trying to reinforce it. Eventually the opponent desisted from any other attempt.

In the area of the *Pasubio* and *Torino* there were no events of particular importance and the activity of the two Divisions, against an ever-lively and decisive opponent, developed through numerous reconnaissance in forces that, winning the reaction of the opposing patrols, were able to ascertain the presence of good starting points for the Russian maneuvering attack.

The enemy aircraft was absent during the attack of its infantry, but intervened during our counter-offensive phase with an intense activity by number and size of the raids, with bombing and machine-gun operations.

The Italian fighter, by measuring more numerous enemy formations, managed to shoot down 15 aircraft in three days.

Losses: Soviet: 2,000 dead, 1,200 prisoners, 24 cannons of 76, 9 anti-tank, 22 machine guns, 100 sub machine guns, hundreds of rifles, 12 trucks, 4 cars, 200 animal pulled vehicles, considerable ammunition and much material; by the Italian side: 168 dead (13 official), 715 injured (14 officers), 207 missing (9 official), 305 frozen (6 officers) (1).

Quelling the last sporadic resistance, the defensive line could be given the definitive rearrangement. Therefore, in order to give greater balance to the deployment of the divisions of the *Pasubio* and *Torino* divisions, on 30 December General Messe prescribed:

- the axis of the resistance position: Casello - Savielevka Station - hill 277.4 - Ubesicce - Junyj Kommunar - Malo Orlovka - Novo Orlovka;

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(1) The losses are as follows: *Celere* Division: 131 dead, 494 injured, 199 missing; *Torino* Division: 14 dead, 170 injured, 8 missing, 237 frozen; *Pasubio* Division: 23 dead, 47 injured, 68 frozen.

- advanced positions: Ploskij with the hills adjacent to Vessieli;
- sectors:  
for *Pasubio*, from the Chazepetovka railway - Debalzevo to the middle of Bulavin included;  
for *Torino*, from the middle of Bulavin, excluded, to the line of contact with the *Celere* Division and the 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry located in the Vessieli - Junyj Kommunar area.

#### D) CONSIDERATIONS

In this battle of Christmas 1941, the Italian units that held the line of resistance were scarce, below organic and diluted in largely spaced villages. The gunners were in line with the infantry, lacked any passive obstacle, defensive preparations were still incomplete, the setting temperature, the thick, impenetrable fog.

It is not therefore unfounded to say that it was won mainly by the steadfast firmness and excellence of our soldiers. Everyone unequivocally struggled with courage and impetus: infantry, Bersaglieri, Militia, Artillery, Engineers. To the numerical deficiency of the units, they managed to meet with the highest moral and military skills.

As for the adversary, he had prepared the operation with an overwhelming superiority of forces to mass in a delicate junction point on the opposite side. In the conduct of the offensive, he demonstrated tactical sensitivity and professional competence and was supported in the development of action by the commitment and decision with which subordinate units and men operated.

It is likely that the goals the Soviets had proposed to achieve in this battle were not limited to the tactical field, but extended more deeply.

They demonstrate with the care which the battle itself was prepared, the great forces that were involved, the presence of a large mass of cavalry destined for the exploitation of success and the same choice of the direction of attack towards Stalino.

The Christmas battle, in summary, ended positively for the Italian units.

In fact, from a Russian attack on forces, certainly planned for achieving more than tactical targets, the CSIR units demonstrated a strong resistance to tackling the overwhelming mass of Soviet attackers with firm tenacity

then take advantage of the arrest imposed on enemy units to improve their positions, leading the *Celere* front further and securing the *Torino*, with Ploskij's occupation, another important other advanced element.

## 2. - THE EVENTS AFTER THE CHRISTMAS BATTLE

After the Christmas battle, the enemy for a time restricted his activity to disruptive actions and local attacks that, though frequent and harassing, could not but raise concerns about his attitude and immediate intentions.

However, some of these attacks took on particular significance and among them deserving mention of the two feat of arms at Voroscilova.

### A) THE BATTLE OF VOROSCILOVA

The end-of-year counter-offensive had determined, as we have seen, moving *Celere's* positions to a more advanced line. However, this line did not lend itself to everywhere in order to stabilize the new resistance position, and especially at Voroscilova, and because it is located on the low northern slopes of the Nikitino - Junyj Kommunar, and because it is totally dominated by the Molotova heights. It was therefore necessary to make the line more secure with appropriate corrections.

At the edge of Voroscilova the natural pillar on which the resistance position had to lean was hill 331.7. But it did not offer any shelter for the men who would have to garrison it and the Command of the XLIX German Alpine Corps, in which *Celere* was framed, therefore ordered to retain Voroscilova's possession until the excavation work on the hill they had reached a degree of organization that would enable them to occupy.

The battle of Voroscilova was therefore vital because of the execution of the work on hill 331,7 could continue regularly out of direct enemy pressure; if the hill had fallen, the entire sector of *Celere* was compromised, which should have therefore come to a halt.

Of this, the Russians were well aware of and after having conducted a pounding action against the 63<sup>rd</sup> CC.NN Legion for the first half of January who was guarding Vorosilova, with the ceaseless fire of mortars and with violent bombing and plane bombing, decided to attack. The fighting went on for two days, 18 and 19 January, but at the end the opponent had to desist from his goal.

It was thus possible on the 20<sup>th</sup> to change the legion's militias who were replaced by a unit of the XVIII Bersaglieri battalion.

The renunciation of the Russians to conquer the important inhabited area was only apparent, as the ranks that were already engaged in action with fresh forces and created a good mass of impact had risen, the 23<sup>rd</sup> they again launched against Vorosilova. The defensive line broke under the overwhelming adversary and the Bersaglieri were no longer able to replenish it despite the desperate valor with which they opposed the spread of the attackers.

They therefore had to fall back on the back of hill 331.7 where the impetus of the opponent aiming to expand the success was definitely broken.

The Soviets were also happy to organize themselves well in defense in Vorosilova so that, when the 25<sup>th</sup> was attempted to regain, the Bersaglieri came across insurmountable fire barriers and, incurring sensitive losses, had to suspend the attack.

Meanwhile, the efforts to strengthen hill 331.7 had now reached a satisfactory level, so it would have been pointless to insist on an action that had lost much of its primordial importance.

The operation on Vorosilova was therefore permanently suspended.

The losses suffered by the *Celere* were altogether: 24 (6 officers), injured 86 (2 officers), missing 42 (official), frozen 180 (4 officers).

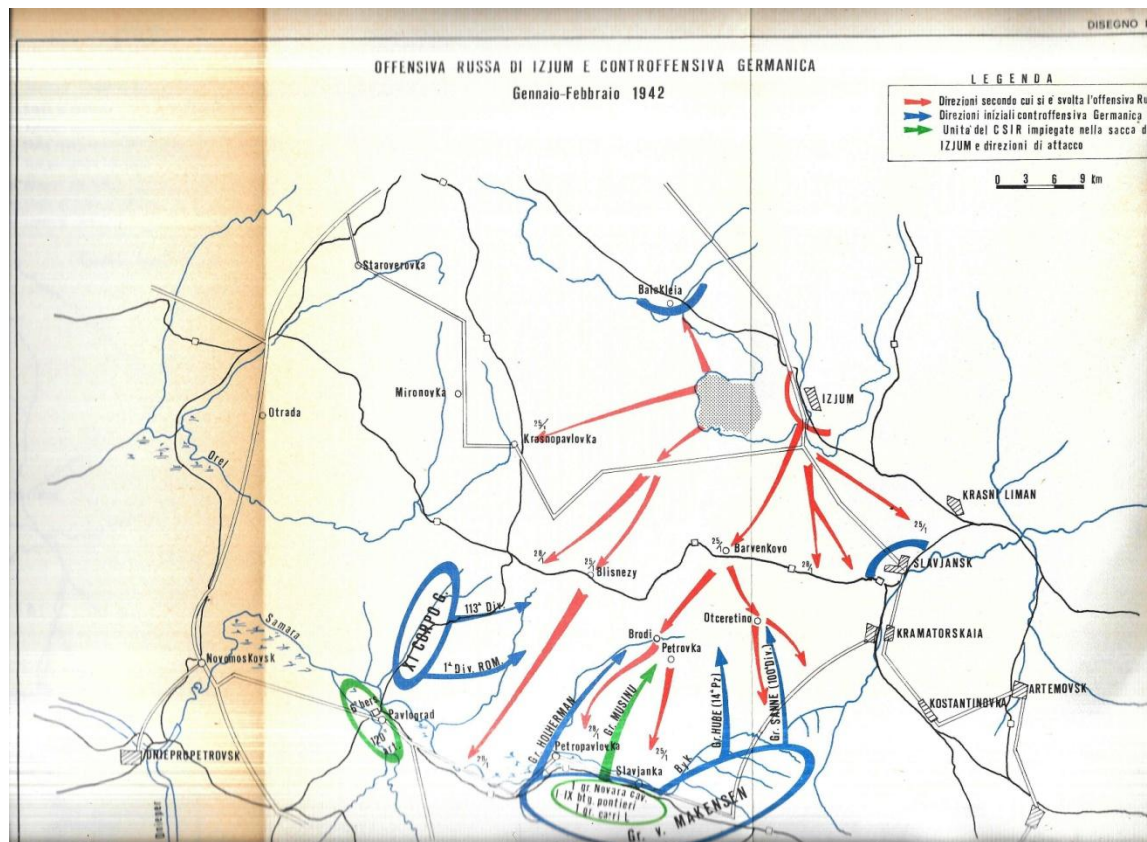
## B) RUSSIAN OFFENSIVE OF IZJUM

*(Drawing No 17)*

Meanwhile, on January 21, in the Ukraine, began the great Russian offensive that upsets the deployment of the 17<sup>th</sup> German Army and created a large salient about 100 kilometers deep to the west of Izjum (south east of Karkov).

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map 17



Unlocking the breach, the Soviet armies had spread westward, south and northwest, having as their likely target the important crossroads of Dniepropetrovsk (but they could not win).

The Germans reacted at first by organizing a line of improvised strongpoints in which they fought with great determination to stop the opponent before it reached the conquest of important rail and road junctions, whose loss would threaten the entire deployment of the Southern Armies.

Subsequently, by sufficiently stabilizing the line and partially encapsulating the threatening push of the Soviets, the German Command went to the counter-offensive with two Large Units formations: the von Mackensen group, which in turn consisted of three smaller groups named after their Commanders - Hube, Kohlermann and Sanne - and the XI Army Corps, in the Pavlograd area.

In order to ensure a unitary development in battle, on 29 January the 17<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Armies merged into a Group of Armies under Gen. von Kleist.

The Germanic counter-offensive attempted to kick the enemy by attacking him with the Hube group from south to north, aiming at the junction of Alexandroupka on the Samara River; with the Kohlermann group that, proceeding from Petropavlovka along Samara's course, would have to invest the opponent on the left flank, aiming for the same goal.

To the danger that the opponent - who, among other things, had numerous and valiant cavalry and armored formations - fell on the Stalino - Griscino - Dniepropetrovsk railway, interrupting the only supply of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army and the CSIR, the German Command, who knew the absolute lack of reserves of the Italian Corps, addressed to Gen. Messe urgent demands for the too thin forces of the German alarm units to be adequately strengthened with the help of Italian light units.

The Commander of the CSIR had nothing else to be able to dispose of and could not, on the other hand, undermine its line of resistance and weaken the positions of divisional sectors. He therefore decided to draw on the only unemployed units, which were the cavalry and the "L" tank group *S. Giorgio*. But the numerical modesty of those units forced Gen. Messe to radical decisions, and on Jan. 28, after leaving Meshevaja-Slavjanka a member of the *Novara* regiment, took away

from its own deployment, also the I Pioneer Battalion, immediately followed by the S. *Giorgio* formation group and the IX Pioneer battalion. Finally, always under the pressure of Germany, a 75/27 battery was also taken from the *Pasubio* Division.

Overall, CSIR ceded to the German Command for the planned action: 1,340 men, including 47 officers, with 54 light machine guns and 14 machine guns. The units to which these forces belonged united on February 6, 1942, into a tactical group under the orders of Colonel Giuseppe Musinu.

To such a heterogeneous tactical group, not trained to fight on foot, with insufficient armaments for the lack of accompanying weapons, could not be entrusted with the execution of force acts of some importance and, moreover, their own denomination of "units of alarm" clearly indicated its limits of use. They were therefore entrusted initially with a task appropriate to their operational possibilities, namely the surveillance of a section of the railway between Dniepropetrovsk and Stalino (between Ulianovka and Griscino).

But the severity of the situation forced the Germans to engage in battle also the tactical group Musinu and shortly after its formation it was joined to the Germanic units destined for the conquest of the Samara line, after having exhausted for a few days the connection between the two groups Hube and Kohlermann assault, was then used as a front-line unit in attacking the enemy positions of Sofievka, Tschervonnyi, Brodi, Nikolaievka, Petrovka, Snamenovka, in a sector to which the performance of operations had given particular importance.

In fact, the initiative of the operations had not delayed the return of the Russians, who, reorganizing their forces with the supply of fresh units of infantry, cavalry and armor, again they took the upper hand over the Germans and their allies, taking on an offensive attitude.

Their efforts gravitated: on the front of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army, on horseback to Bachmur, where the German line had a new bending deep about ten kilometers; on the right wing of the Machkensen group, or in the Sanne group, where after violent battles the Soviets managed to conquer Otceretino; on the left wing of the same Machkensen group, namely in the Kohlermann group, where Soviet units started forcing the Samara line. The direct antagonist of these last Soviet columns was the Musinu group whose units, invested by forces



many times superior,, they had to defend themselves with violent struggles. Wiped by intense fire of machine guns, artillery and mortars, attacked with great determination within the interior of the villages and forced into separate house-to-house clashes, surrounded and reduced to scattered decimated groups of losses (2), resisted for three days to the enemy tide.

On the right of the XI Corps, meanwhile, Russian armored forces broke the line held by a Romanian division, threatening to engage the left wing of the Kohlermann group.

To ward off the threat and close the gap, the German Command inserted the Romanian Division into a German group to which it entrusted the task of containing at any cost the advance of the Soviets. Then he formed another German intervention group and reinforced it with the 75/27 battery from the *Pasubio*.

Always for the same purpose predispose the formation of a tactical grouping, holding it in reserve, formed by the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri regiment and the 120<sup>th</sup> motorized artillery regiment, just arrived from Italy at Dniepropetrovsk. Rather than stepping on the CSIR deployment zone (they were destined for the *Celere* Division), they were diverted to Pavlograd. The command of the grouping was entrusted to Colonel Lombardi.

The Germans finally pulled from the XLIX Corp the 1<sup>st</sup> Alpine Division and, with the support of tanks, launched it from Petrovka in the direction of Dobrinka - Ossatschij, on the flank of the Russian forces advancing between Samara and Ternovka.

The actions of the Germans were successful; they conquered Ossatschij, an important communications node between the two rivers, and forced an enemy cavalry Corps to fall back into disorder after suffering many losses.

Immediate consequence of these operations was a diminished Soviet pressure on Pavlograd, Petropavlovka and Slavjanka and a significant improvement both in local effects and in the general framework of operations, even though the Soviet salient of Izjum had not yet been eliminated.

As for the Italian units involved in these operations, the Commander of the CSIR was of the opinion that the ceding of the two bridging battalions I and IX to be used exceptionally as a line infantry unit, though determined by greater force,

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(2) At the end of the battle counted: 101 dead (7 officers), injured 238 (7 officers), missing 21, frozen 7.

it would have long been affected with serious damage to the skill and technical expertise of the engineers that were the units themselves.

General Messe dispatched the replacement with another group of the *Nouara*, who, together with the another who had been part of the first tactical group, re-established the regimental unit on the spot. To the *Novara Lancieri* Regiment was added the “S. *Giorgio*” group of tanks and both units were duly reinforced with various units.

The total strength of this new tactical group, which was formed on 28 February, had 28 officers, 618 non-commissioned officers, graduates and soldiers, two 47/32 pieces, 2 mortars of 81, 10 machine guns and 35 light machine guns.

Colonel Giusiana Commander of *Novara*, took over command.

The return of bridging unit to the CSIR and the formation of this second tactical group had led to the collapse of the group commanded by Colonel Musinu.

Already for a week, that is, on February 21, the Alpine battalion *Monte Cervino* had also arrived in the area, with two companies, who departed from Rykovo, to the operational dependencies of the CSIR Command, but practically aimed at reinforcing the *Torino* and *Pasubio* Divisions with reconnaissance and patrol tasks on the fronts of the divisions themselves.

### C) OPERATIONS ON THE TWO FRONTS

#### IZJUM FRONT.

As a result of Izjum's pocket, the front of the Army Group von Kleist had taken on a square, oriented north and east direction. The operations on the two sides of the corner soon became a matter of close interdependence: by the Germans and their allies to hold with a minimum of strength the massive enemy raid and to realize the potential for maneuver at the most advantageous point; by the Russians to expand the territorial conquest to strategic success and at the same time engage the eastern sector with demonstrable actions to attract Germanic reserves in that direction.

The German Command had little reservations, as it has been seen, and to create it had no other possibility than to take congruent units from the eastern divide line for the benefit of

northern deployment where the battle was still in fluid state and the situation, worse than good, remained favorable to the opponent.

The direct consequence of such a situation was an intensified activity by all the units deployed from Izjum to the sea, and therefore also the CSIR that more fused its energies to those of neighboring Corps and which at the common intent offer ever generous contributions.

Restored with the intervention of the German Alpine Division, the situation between Samara and Ternovka, the opponent moved the center of gravity of their attacks to the left wing of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army and more properly on the front of the 97<sup>th</sup> Division. To cope with the new threat, the Command of the Army Group von Kleist dispose of the concentration in that area of the 60<sup>th</sup> Motorized Division, placing it directly under the command of the Machkensen Group, and moving the Lombardi Group (6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri and 120<sup>th</sup> artillery) to the east, from Pavlograd to Postiscevo.

In this way, the further impact by the Russians in mid-March could be readily contained by the timely intervention of the 60<sup>th</sup> German Division, nor the subsequent repeated efforts of the opponent achieved any tangible result.

While doing these operations, Col. Giusiana's tactical group was kept in reserve for the III Corps in the Krivoroschije area and later on with the same task was placed alongside the German 93<sup>rd</sup> Alpine Regiment in the area by Nova Snamenovka. A squadron of the *Novara* Cavalry, which was used to reinforce allied lines, was used on March 27 in a local action.

#### FRONT OF THE CSIR.

Meanwhile, from the end of January to the last days of February, the Soviets maintained a lively, constant aggressive activity on the CSIR front, carrying out continuous recon actions on the line defended by the Italians.

At last they decided to make a close attack and as a target they chose the village of Novaja Orlovka.

This place, already located in the jurisdiction of the *Celere*, on December 27, had passed in the sphere of responsibility of *Torino* that with that appendix had seen its front assume, in small proportions, the same configuration as that of the Army Group. At corner, that is, with two sides facing east

and to the north. Especially on the extreme right, that divisional sector was particularly delicate, as an enemy attack in that direction would have brought the threat to the height and, by the shortest route, directly to important goals such as Jassinovataia and Stalino.

An element of such importance had its weight in the organization of the line that had been appropriately strengthened.

By the middle of January, when the Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army assigned to the CSIR the 525<sup>th</sup> Panzerjager, with two companies, General Messe sent to the *Torino* a company and a platoon of that battalion, another platoon assigned by him to the *Pasubio* and the third was kept at the disposal of the CSIR Command by locating it at Rykovo so that it was ready to intervene promptly in both divisional sectors.

Against such solid positions, the attack of the enemy on February 27, after a massive preparation of medium and small caliber artillery, began. On the advancing Russian units, the fire of all the weapons of the I/81<sup>st</sup> infantry that Novaja Orlovka, that of divisional artillery, and also the fire of the artillery of *Celere* and *Pasubio* promptly intervened.

So the Russian attacking units were unmoving before they reached the proximity of the strongpoint and the attack fled hopelessly. The opponent, however, did not want to consider the game lost, and at 10:30 again with angry tenacity against the eastern section of the strongpoint itself. The fighting, which was haunted by extreme rage, came to an end in the late afternoon, ending with the defeat of the Russians who had to fall back on their positions after leaving about 700 men dead and injured on the ground, including 9 officers, as well as numerous weapons and other materials. To the I/81<sup>st</sup>, the fierce defense cost 5 dead and 12 wounded.

In this operation, the Soviets used the entire 541<sup>st</sup> infantry regiment and two battalions of the 387<sup>th</sup>, supported by eight medium and small caliber batteries. With such overwhelming forces, 5 battalions against 1, it was possible to keep in mind the immediacy with which the enemy's purpose was perceived by the defenders, so the attackers missed the surprise factor, and that of the fiery fire of all CSIR artillery.

The enemy had suffered serious losses and it is likely that the combat effectiveness of the two regiments used in the action was seriously compromised. However, the Russians did not slow down the usual aggressive behavior with regard to the units they faced. Indeed,

they made a new attempt against the strongpoint of Malo Orlovka, who was promptly foiled by the vigilance and counterattack of the defenders,, the 81<sup>st</sup> infantry, and two days later, a attack coming from the head of the balka Klinovaja and headed towards the Novaja Orlovka strongpoint had the same effect: The conquest of this goal seemed to be particularly pressing for the Russians, so much so that in the night on March 6th, with forces valued at a battalion, supported by mortars and artillery, they attacked it again extending the action from Novaja Orlovka to the contiguous position of hill 298.3 The attack was cut short by the barrage of artillery and mortars and the strongholds of robust units before the enemy reached the advanced positions of the defenders.

A few days later, 11 March, the enemy action resumed on the front of the *Pasubio*, where enemy formations attacked the strongpoint of hill 277.4. The units of the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry battalions managed to stop the attackers who had to return to the starting positions after leaving some prisoners and some weapons in the Italian hand.

Even on the part of CSIR did not remain inactive and at the same time as the units developed uninterrupted exploratory actions, many local attacks were carried out with the aim of causing the enemy reaction, force it to reveal itself, ascertain its consistency and keep the forces that faced the Italian positions fully committed.

Of these actions, the most important was the one carried out in the Divisions of *Pasubio* and *Torino* on March 22, at the same time as similar operations of the XV and XLIX German Army Corps, to prevent the Soviets from feeding their attacks in Izjum's pocket with unemployed forces of the sectors.

It was a combined offensive operation of the two divisions against Olkovatka, in order to give the enemy the obvious feeling of a real threat to that location, and to capture prisoners and weapons.

The *Pasubio* used, in the action (direction of attack Miniera - Mogila Ostraja - Olkovatka) the *Monte Cervino* alpine battalion, reinforced by a mortar company of 81 and two machine gun platoons of the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry, exploring elements of the 79<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> infantry with the support of the III group of the 8<sup>th</sup> artillery.

*Torino* departed to the attack (direction of attack Vessieli - hill 261.4) with the I/82<sup>nd</sup> Infantry reinforced by a mortar platoon of 81

and a platoon from 47/32, with the support of the II group/52<sup>nd</sup> artillery.

In order to ensure the co-ordination of the two actions, the *Monte Ceroina* Battalion had to surprise at the early dawn lights, that is, not before 05:00. As soon as the reaction appeared, the *Torino* Division had to beat for 10 minutes with fire his weapons in the village of Olkovatka and then start the attack with the support of his artillery. The aviation had to mass, no later than 07:00, to bomb and the machine gun Olkovatka's inhabited area and any affluent enemy forces.

The operation took place in the manner and in the timescale. Despite the sharpness of the temperature (30° below zero), the units overcame the enemy's security zone, forcing advanced enemy elements to retreat; emerging from two converging directions on the Olkovatka basin, firmly engaged the line of enemy resistance, arranged in contradiction.

The threat to such a delicate and essential point of the defensive organization, the mass use of our artillery, the repeated intervention of our aviation, achieved the desired effect because the enemy was actually induced, as was the purpose of the action, as it was the purpose of the action, to assume the worst and, worried about the further development broader attack, he got in alarm reinforcements and reserves.

This was an instant test because the Russian Command in order to neutralize, or at least ease, the action to which it was subjected, engaged in combat the *Celere* Division on whose front in the same morning repeated attacks at our positions on hill 331.7, 316.6 and 301.0. With particular agility the Russians repeatedly attacked the XVIII Bersaglieri battalion, which however knew how to properly undermine the enemy's power.

As it was impossible to achieve tactical results of some importance, the Soviets decided to fall back.

Even the columns of *Pasubio* and *Torino*, reached the goal that had determined their operation, fell back to their positions.

#### D) NEW ORDERING OF THE CSIR

Bearing in mind the need for the Expeditionary Corps to present itself in the best operational efficiency conditions for next spring's offensive resumption, in a phase that was supposed to be

concluding for the fate of the war on the eastern front, Gen. Messe had forwarded from December 1941 to the Supreme Command the following proposals:

- transformation of the *Celere* Division into a Motorized Division;
- allocation of two divisions, preferably alpine, intended to replace the two transportable divisions for which the conversion into motorized or mountain divisions was requested;
- replenishment of horse losses and the constitution of a troop grouping with horse-drawn artillery, in view of the remarkable characteristics of homogeneity of those units and the fact that the units themselves could find useful employment in that particular topographic environment;
- reinforcement of the armor units by the assignment of "M" tank units, a second artillery grouping with 149/40 material and a battalion of sappers;
- Replacement of reconnaissance unit "CA 311" with two "BR 20" squadrons and further assignment of two fighter squadrons, possibly equipped with "MC 202" aircraft;
- repairs of motor vehicles and other materials for the already existing Divisions.

Of these proposals, the *Celere* Division transformation could be fully realized, which since March 15, 1942 became a Motorized Division as:

- Receives: the 6<sup>th</sup> Motorized Bersaglieri Regiment, which joins the 3<sup>rd</sup> already on the site and to which are assigned the vehicles for the road haulage; the XLVII Bersaglieri motorcycle battalion; the IC Mortar battalion and the 272<sup>nd</sup> 47/32 cannon company, both motorized; the 120<sup>th</sup> motorized artillery regiment (with a group of 100/17 and two 75/27 cannon groups). Subsequently, in the summer of 1942, the Division will also receive the LXVII Armored Bersaglieri Battalion (Tanks L/6 - 40) and the XIII Group of 47/32 *Cavalleggeri of Alexandria*;
- Losses: the cavalry regiments *Savoia* and *Navara*, which on the same date of March 15 form the "Grouping troops on horseback" under the orders of Colonel Barbò, already commander of the *Savoy*; the artillery regiment on horseback, also being part of the grouping on horseback; the third group of "L" tanks (repatriated).

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE EVENTS FROM APRIL TO JUNE 1942. THE CSIR ASSISTANCE TO THE GERMAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE ON IZJUM

The offensive effort in the Izjum pocket had exhausted, and the Soviets simply made frequent, but partial, attacks on both flanks of the Army Group. The CSIR sector was not free of it.

Meanwhile, seasonal conditions improving and thus gradually ceasing the reasons that in the meantime had informed the criteria of the defensive organization supported by the towns, a progressive implementation of a work program was planned: to review and correct, if necessary, the trend of the line of resistance, considering that the soil recovered all its decisive value; to adapt the field organization to the new aspect that the environment assumed with the dissolution of the snow; to re-examine consequently the artillery deployment.

Thus, the occupation of the Savielevka - Ubescicce ridge was strengthened in the Pasubio area; Ploskij, who was already an advanced leader in the position of resistance, became a simple observation post; the continuity of the line between the *Torino* and the *Pasubio* was established with the establishment of two new intermediaries between Ubescicce and Junyj Kommunar; were assembled by the two artillery groups LX and LXI already assigned to the *Pasubio* and *Torino*, to replenish the mass of maneuver of the CSIR Command.

The contingents of complements, which had been requested from the Supreme Command since December, began to flow with some regularity and periodicity, so the numerical consistency of the units was improving.

The assignment to the CSIR of the Croatian Legion was also announced. Informed of this, and in connection with the preparation of the great Germanic offensive for the removal of the Izjum pocket, the Commander of the Armored Army asked Gen. Messe



to be able to arrange for it to be among the Allied divisions on the Samara. The CSIR Commander represented that such a movement was exempt from his competencies, despite the justified reasons for the request. He made available to the Army Commander all the best elements directly employed and precisely: the Alpine battalion *Monte Cervino*; reinforced by a company of accompanying weapons and two platoon formation made up of artillery, the 1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri motorcyclist company, the 3<sup>rd</sup> company, less a platoon, the LII mortar battalion and the flamethrower company of the Army Corps chemical Battalion.

These units joined the tactical group formed on February 28 under the command of Col. Giusiana, already in the area, and thus transformed into a tactical grouping under the command of Col. Barbò.

The strength of this second tactical grouping made available to the Germans was 71 Officers and 1,614 NCO, Graduates and Soldiers, with a total of 83 light machine guns, 16 machine guns, 6 mortars of 81 and 6 guns of 47/32.

The grouping, reinforced by two German battalions and the 75/27 battery of the *Pasubio* already operating in a Germanic units since February, will be deployed to the left wing of the German III Armored Corps in the sector Verch. Samara - Lugovoj - Baschilovo.

The Croatian Legion came to the area on April 19 and was part of the *Celere* Division. The CC.NN Legion was thus made available therefore came back to the direct dependencies of the CSIR Command, moving to Makeievka where it waited for its reorganization.

Throughout this time, the aviation of CSIR took on intense activity, especially when transferring all Germanic crews to Crimea for the German offensive were devoted to protecting the sky of the von Kleist Army Group and the escort of the reconnaissance.

1. - CSIR PARTICIPATION  
IN THE GERMAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE  
ON THE POCKET OF IZJUM  
(Drawing No 18)

To create the preconditions for the resumption of the major offensive operations of the next summer season and to make the deployment of the Armed Forces more responsive to a positive start

## Map 18



of the new advance eastward, the German Supreme Command decided to complete the occupation of the Crimea and to remove the deep Izjum pocket.

Offensive operations in Crimea, started in the first decade of May, ended after a bitter struggle with the total occupation of the peninsula by the Germans.

On the morning of May 12, perhaps in response to the Germanic Crimean offensive, the Russians sprang with a great deal of force a concentric attack on Karkov, thus preventing the offensive that the Germans were preparing for the slaying of the Izjum pocket.

The Russian initiative did not bother the German Command, so the offensive planned by it had to commence on a regular basis, ie at dawn on May 17, from the Miokj-Alexandrovka front on Samara by the 17<sup>th</sup> Army and III Armored Corps.

The 17<sup>th</sup> Army returned fighting on the Donez line, to the confluence with Bereka, the river on which the III Corps passed over Vell. Kamyshevaka, constituted a bridgehead in Petroskaja. Following such successes, the enemy's pressure northward, Karkov, and eastward on Krassnograd, slowed down and, indeed, the Russian forces began to move out of the pocket. They did not succeed because they were overwhelmed by the Concentric Maneuver of the German III and XI Corps, acting east and south respectively, tended to eliminate the enemy masses between the Samara and the Vell. Kamyshevaka parallel.

At this stage of the struggle came into effect on May 18 the Battle Group Barbò, the extreme left wing of the III Corps. His job was to occupy the ridge of Mal Rastol, Klynovoj, Ivanovka, pivoting to the left on Lugovoj's position, where it was necessary to secure the junction with the Romanian 20<sup>th</sup> Division.

For the action, the grouping was reinforced by the Kaus battalion formation, of the total strength of 240 men, who together with another German battalion formed the marching wing with the aim of occupying the ridge of Mal Rastol.

The two German battalions in the morning of 18 advanced resolutely towards the enemy, but their engagement only led to partial results because the strong reaction of the defenders prevented the conquest of the hamlet of Mal Rastol.

In collaboration with these units, the mountain battalion *Monte Cerlino* and the Bersaglieri company used to act as the centerpiece of the alpine battalions, which overcame the resistances that enemy offered

on advanced positions of hill 169.1, they entered fighting in the village of Klynovoj of which they took possession with close quarters fighting.

But when their attack had overtaken the town and invested another portion that was the ultimate goal of the day, the Soviets returned to attack with overwhelming forces evaluated at four battalions, threatening to envelop, from two different points, alpine and the Bersaglieri. All that remained of our units retired to the starting positions.

The Russians attempted to expand their success but, beaten by the violent shooting of the artillery, were forced to retreat.

Despite the fact that the villages of Mal Rastol and Klynovoj remained in the Soviet hand, the result of the day could be said to favor the Italian units, even in the overall interest of the action in that sector, since the minimum forces had engaged large enemy contingents, to exert a serious pressure against the side of another German unit (the 1st Alpine Division).

Meanwhile, the maneuver of III and XI Corps was now emerging in its final phase. The Russian divisions, hopelessly enveloped, relied on their salvation to a supreme, desperate attempt to get out of the encirclement, but without success. However, exerting contemporary and concentric assaults from the inside of the pocket and the left bank of the Donez, they imposed on the battle such a rigorous and intense rhythm that the III Corps put into serious difficulty; who not only had to give all his reservations in the fight but also had to ask the Commander of CSIR for the urgent intervention of other Italian units.

Gen. Messe made available to the von Kleist Group two tactical groups, one of the *Pasubio* (I/80<sup>th</sup> infantry and II/8<sup>th</sup> artillery) and one of the *Torino* (II/81<sup>st</sup> infantry and II/52<sup>nd</sup> artillery), which departed on May 26th for Barvskovo.

In connection with the departure from the positions of the CSIR of the two battalions, second-rate units constituting the only available counter-forces, Gen. Messe ordered the CC.NN group. *Tagliamento*, located in Makeievka, to move on the same day to Rykovo for possible employment in the areas of the *Pasubio* and *Torino*.

The battle ended on 28 May with the annihilation of two Soviet armies. In their bulletins the Germans reported that they had captured 240,000 men and a huge booty of cannons, various arms and other material.

The Italian units, when the situation had already been resolved, were used in the battle zone battle operations.

The two artillery groups came to CSIR on June 7<sup>th</sup>, while the two battalions could only return to their regiments on June 26 after being employed by a German group to protect a railroad.

Meanwhile, on May 26, the Barbari tactical grouping had come back to CSIR's dependencies.

Even the *Celere* Division had been back in the CSIR for a few days, since by improving the situation on the front of the XLIX German Alpine Corps, no more justified its extra organic addiction.

On June 3, 1942, the Italian Expeditionary Corps changed its employment dependence and from the German 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army, with which it had operated for ten months, passed to the 17<sup>th</sup> Army.

The defensive activity on the CSIR front was extended until July 10, as the recovery of offensive operations began on July 11 with the maneuver for the conquest of the important Mius coal mine (Krasny Luch).

During the month of June and in the first decade of July there was no matter of CSIR arms. In fact, the Italian units only had to defend themselves from the frequent attacks, however modest, and by the surprise attacks of the Soviets, who never renounced their traditional activity of disturbance and harassment.

The Russians' activity was particularly insistent against the fronts of the *Pasubio* and *Celere*.

Among those actions, the most important was that brought on June 27 against two strongpoints of the *Celere* (Greco Timofejevsky and hill 311.7), held by the VI Bersaglieri battalion.

At 03:00 in the morning suddenly fell on the strongpoint of hill 311.7 the fire of Soviet artillery and after about forty minutes of preparation, forces valued at a strongly reinforced battalion (belonging to the 1149<sup>th</sup> regiment expressly brought in line for the action) began the attack to occupy two fire centers after defenders had dropped their weapons.

Immediately counterattacked by a backup company, the Russians were forced to retreat. From then on, pressed on the flank, from the reserve unit, they had to return to their positions after leaving a hundred deaths and some prisoners on the ground

The Battalion losses amounted to 15 dead (1 officer) and 33 injured (4 officers).

With this battle, which also constituted the baptism of fire of the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri to the Russian front, the operation of the Expeditionary Corps was completed, but not that of its units, since from the 00:00 on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, the Command of CSIR came under the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army, under the orders of General Italo Gariboldi.

However, in order not to upset the existing dependency relationships, while all the predispositions for the reopening of offensive operations were already in place, it was agreed that CSIR would remain temporarily dependent on the 17<sup>th</sup> German Army, which was under the same date as "Army Group Ruoff",

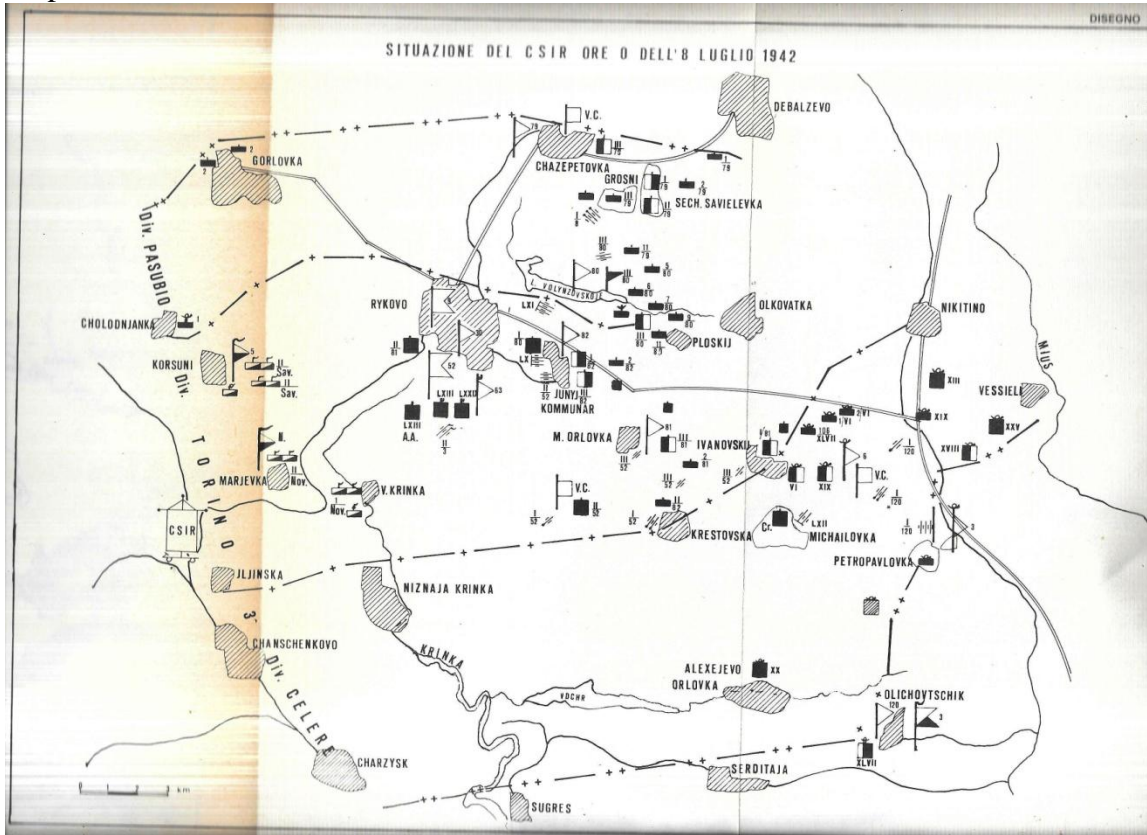
The Italian Expeditionary Corps took over the name of XXXV Corps which, in a sign of distinction for its benevolences, was added to the acronym that until then had marked it, namely XXXV Army Corps - CSIR.

The deployment of the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, which also sets the underlying situation for the recovery of offensive operations, is shown in Drawing no. 19.

The new divisions and units, destined to form the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army, were at that time running their own assembly in the backward areas; some were already on the site, others under discharge or still traveling.

The Army, therefore, remained for the time virtually unrelated to any possibility of use during the upcoming announcements. Only the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR was available to it, to which it would remain the task of representing it.

Map 19



### PART THREE

#### THE OPERATIONS OF THE 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY





## CHAPTER IX CONSTITUTION, TRANSFER AND WORK OF THE 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY

### 1. – CONSTITUTION

The gathering of the Italian Expeditionary Corps in Russia had not yet been completed, and already (July 13, 1941), at the Supreme Command, which adjusted to a precise political will, was being studied for the rise of the number of Large Units sent to fight on that theater of action, because in the competent jurisdiction it was judged: "We can not be less present than the Slovaks and we must be deployed to the ally" (1).

Not only was it planned to send another Army, but it also specified the constitution on two or three Divisions, whose names were made, completed by black shirt units to be understood between the direct units of the Commander of the Corps.

The analysis of the documents of the Supreme Command makes it clear that only a quick departure of that Large Unit has been the lack of the necessary vehicles for the artillery and logistical services.

The lack of production of automotive goods, stemming from the shortage of raw materials and the need to cater primarily to the needs of the African front, had prompted the Italian Supreme Command to ask the German to provide the vehicles required for the reduced motorization of the new Large Units they would be joined to the Germanic ones (Documents Nos 43, 44, 45 and 46).

At the end of July 1941, General Giovanni Messe, Commander of CSIR, learned the news that in Italy was underway the expansion of the Expeditionary Corps with the preparation of a

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(1) Declaration made by the Head of Government.

another Army Corps, as has been said, with infantry on foot and with only artillery and motorized services.

Now aware of the difficulties encountered by the insufficient degree of motorization of CSIR, General Messe, with a mission officer seconded by the Supreme Command himself, urged to inform this, from which he depended, that sending to the Russian front of another Army Corps, equipped with very limited means of transport, would be a serious mistake and therefore it was not advisable to depart (2).

On August 25<sup>th</sup>, Marshal Keitel pointed out that, for the needs of the great German units, it was not possible for the German side to sell cars, not even for units for close cooperation. He also called on the Italian Command not to use the means meant to supply the African front (Document No 47)

The sending of another Army was therefore subject to a halt, and no decision had been made at the end of October. The "Ciano Diary" (3) reports Mussolini's intention to contribute to operations on the Russian front with twenty new divisions. The Chief of General Staff followed such absurd projects, while King Vittorio Emanuele III expressed, with Ciano, "his obvious aversion to such intentions," expressing doubts about the ability of the Army to make such a huge contingent. Within a few days the entity was first reduced to fifteen divisions, and finally to the six subsequently sent. General Cavaleiro himself argued "to have solved the problem of motorization, not letting the troop, but carrying the infantry's day-to-day running stage from eighteen to forty kilometers per day."

They were still struggling to supply vehicles, while new ones were also emerging for anti-tank weapons, machine guns and light machine guns, all of which had the effect of reducing the scope of the project, fixing the quota in only six divisions (Documents n 48 and 49)

At the end of November, during talks between the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Galeazzo Ciano and the Führer, judging how the crisis that had hit from the start as transient and overcome

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(2) GIOVANNI MESSE: "La guerra al fronte russo", June 1947, pp. 27 - 29.

(3) CIANO: "Journal 1941 - 1943", p. 71, 72, 73, 76, 77.

in the winter the Germanic Armies pointed out the future goals in reaching the Volga line, in the occupation of Stalingrad and in the Caucasus attack and the beginning of the Great Eastward march that through Iran, Iraq, Syria and Palestine will lead to the conquest of one of the key positions of the British Empire: Egypt."

In anticipation of these operations, Hitler "would welcome the presence of alpine divisions in the southern sector of the Russian front. Alpine troops who can be very good and who, in collaboration with the Germans and with the current Italian forces, for whom he has still had praise, should attack the Caucasus. Once the mountains are over and the action in the East has begun, Italian participation will have to assume far greater proportions, especially because the fight will be transported to an area of Italian living space."

A letter from Mussolini to Hitler, written on December 3, 1941, seems to explain the Italian will to increase the contribution of war to the Russian front. While on the Italian side it was claimed that "*at least the materials needed for Libya, including heavy weapons, ie artillery and tanks*" (with the exception of men, transportable by air), could be started on the short routes of Biserta and of Tunis (who was banned at that time by the intentions between Germany and France), offered to triple the working force on the Russian front.

The relationship between demand and offer is made evident not only by the consecutiveness of the two periods of the letter, but in the initial sentence of the second: "For this joint effort I am providing, in relation to your recent conversation with Count Ciano, an Alpine Army Corps compound of our best troops, and a mountain infantry Corps that together with CSIR, fully reconstructed by men and means, can represent a vigorous contribution of the Italian armed forces to the prosperity of your magnificent advance to the Caucasus and beyond."

Already at the end of December 1941, Hitler "*thanked the Italian Army Corps (six divisions) that would constitute an army command to which Germanic forces would also be subject*". (Document n. 50).

In reality the promised Germanic forces were first assigned with a certain width, but were then gradually reduced until they were canceled.

In January 1942, at the Supreme Command, the idea was to clarify the idea that, prior to starting operations at Large Units, it was necessary to ensure the functioning of the Logistics Services and that it was a preliminary task to complete the transport of the units for the complete of the CSIR (transformation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division into a motorized unit and sending of complements to all other units). Within this period was also the problem of the constitution of the Army Command and of the Commander's Choice (*Documents 51 and 52*).

During the month of February, due to the fact that the units were being effectively prepared, the problem of the insufficient availability of counter-tank and counter-air, as well as of automotive vehicles, reappeared. In order to be able to collect 75/46 anti-aircraft batteries, it was necessary to rule out the defense of the territory, replacing them with others with less valid material. Requests for vehicles from German remained outstanding (*Document No. 53*).

On February 6, the Chief of the O.K.W., Field Marshal Keitel, indicated the start times of the transport of rallies:

- an Army Corps Command with three divisions at 1 May;
- Army Command and Army Corps Command with three Divisions at June 1st.

The Italian Supreme Commanded the proposed dates, pointing out that the Alpine Corps would leave last.

On April 2, the commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was elected in the person of General Italo Gariboldi, the temporary headquarters of the Command established in Bologna and the commencement of its operation on 1 May.

Meanwhile, provision was made for the provision of equipment for the future winter and a period of training of units destined to operate in that particular environment was prescribed.

In the first decade of April, the Army General Staff had defined the organic formation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

The notion of its constitution on three Army Corps (II, CSIR and Alpine) remained with it, with a considerable number of units directly dependent on the Army Command.

The transformation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division was implemented in the CSIR, and then it would have increased its armament with the assignment

of armored elements. The grouping of cavalry would remain with the CSIR instead of the Army, and likewise the III group of "L" tanks *S. Giorgio*, reduced to two squadrons only (which instead was repatriated for the poor conditions of the material).

The II Corps would have received only one machine gun battalion, instead of the two it was to receive, and this was the only variant of what had been designed for that Great Unit.

The Alpine Corps departed for the intended formation, which was lighter than the other two, as indicated below.

For the units directly subordinate to the Army Command, a very substantial formation was planned, which was not sent because the needs of the African front had to be fulfilled beforehand, and even those of the Balkan territories and the western Alpine border could not be neglected.

Though they were included in the planned formation, they did not go to the Russian front:

- the entire 20<sup>th</sup> regimental group of alpine skiers, formed by the battalions *Monte Rosa*, *Val Toce* and *Val Cenischia*, by a company of anti-tank, of the *Val d'Orco* Alpine Artillery Group (three batteries of 75/13) and a company of Radio engineers. In Russia only the *Monte Cervino* battalion would remain;

- The armored reconnaissance regimental group *Cavalleggeri di Lodi*, consisting of three squadron groups, with a total of 26 armored cars, 56 L/6 (20 mm gun) tanks, 8 pieces of 20 mm anti-aircraft, 9 semoventi 47/32, 8 semoventi of 75/18, a artisans - ferryman platoon;

- the 10<sup>th</sup> semoventi grouping, with groups CLXI, CLXII, CLXIII, each with two batteries, equipped with modern 90/53 cannons.

The latter armored units equipped with 75/18 and 90/53 pieces could have had an important task to accomplish in the crucial phase of Don's second defensive battle.

It was sent to the Russian front, in more than one unit, the CIX machine gun battalion assigned to the Army Command.

It was not excluded that the XXXIV can be replaced by 149/40 of the 9<sup>th</sup> artillery regimental group of the Army with another of equal caliber but with antiquated 149/35 pieces

mouted on a rigid carriage (4), which could never have provided similar performance to the modern 149/40 piece.

In the immediate period before the beginning of the operation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command in Bologna, in a long conversation of April 29, in the Klessheim Castle between General Cavallero and Field Marshal Keitel, the latter expressed a favorable opinion on the behavior of CSIR during the winter season, and promised the future unitary use of the Italian forces of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

The Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, which was constituted on May 1, 1942 in Bologna, was destined to exercise its hierarchical authority on three Army Corps, but in fact, at that moment one of them was taken away from any direct action of the Italian Command, since it had been operating for a long time in the Russian front. The other two, the II Army Corps, in Alexandria, and the Alpine Corps of Bolzano, were far from the Army headquarters. Even the Divisions and other minor units in Italy were located in a large area with the Command of the two Army Corps, which framed them and slowly picked up in areas where rail transport began.

Up until May 10, the units were still engaged in territorial services and hierarchically dependent on the Commands in the territory they were displaced. Only after that date were they freed of the assignments not related to their next use of war.

Other supplements, already operating at the Russian front, would be directly dependent on the Army Command.

The CSIR constitution, even though it was in the area of war and in full swing, was implementing its transformation in order to serve the Army (5).

The constitution of the Large Units destined to operate in the 8th Army, reported by their respective order of battles (*Documents Nos. 54 and 55*), included, in total:

- 122 organic battalions, or corresponding units of the various arms, and 50 autonomous companies, or corresponding units of the

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(4) Maximum throw 17,500 meters.

(5) see. monograph: «I Servizi logistici delle Unità italiane al fronte russo (1941 - 1943)».

the various arms, equivalent to the force of 16 battalions and other smaller units, for a of 229,005 men;

- 25,000 draft animals; 16,700 motor vehicles and 4,470 motorized means;
- 2,657 machine gun guns, 1,742 machine guns, 423 mortars of 81, 874 mortars of 45, 278 anti-tank guns of 47/32, 31 L/6 (6.8 tons) tanks, 19 semoventi of 47/32 (6.5 tons);
- 977 pieces of artillery of various sizes; “also taking into account the 20 mm pieces of the 31 L/6 tanks of the LXVII armored Bersaglieri battalion”.
- 23 reconnaissance planes of the 71<sup>st</sup> Group (16 Ca 311 – 7 Br 20);
- 41 fighter planes of the 21<sup>st</sup> Group Aut. C.T. (30 MC 200 - 11 MC 202).

From the examination of the organs of the 8th Army it is clear that its constitution was a great effort for the Army and for the whole country, which was incumbent on to fuel the war in action or strength on all other fronts, as well as providing for the immediate defense of metropolitan territory.

There are therefore two conflicting demands: to give all that is possible, so that the specific purposes to which the Supreme Command was aimed were achieved; do not overly affect all the other requirements to the exclusive growth of a single sector.

The Army did not have any Divisions to dispose of in the second tier and to use it directly to exploit readily a possible success or to strengthen a threatened front line, not least to make alterations to defensive positions. In fact, the *Vicenza* Division had been constituted as a "Division for occupation", devoid of the artillery regiment and the mortar battalion, endowed with only one anti-tank company and a machine gun battalion.

The Army lacked unified units to break through and penetrate through the breaches, not being eligible for the first task and at the initial stage of the second, the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division, constituted as a Motorized Division and to which the conferral force was not enough by the two modest armored units that had come to Russia.

A special note was given by the inclusion of the Croatian Legion, formed by a rifle battalion, reinforced by accompanying weapons unit and a company of complements.



That unit should have affirmed the alignment of independent Croatia with the Powers of the Axis on the battlefield) and the "anti-komintern pact".

In general, the orgasm of the Army was rather that of a Great Unit formed to fight in mountainous terrain, as it seemed to be destined to do, in accordance with the political intentions made before its constitution and how the Italian military tradition demonstrates be a positive feature of the Italian fighter, prepared for that task by the physical conformation of his country.

Three Army Corps, two (the II and the Alpine), had all the infantry to move on foot, while the XXXV - CSIR could carry only two of its three divisions (a self - transporter and the Celere). It resulted from this organic situation that the Army, if employed in a flat area, would not be able to participate in offensive operations and be forced into a defensive use.

The Alpine Corps repeated the organic disadvantage already noted at the Army, not having a small mass of maneuver. The II and the XXXV - CSIR had, at least, the six battalions of the black shirts regimental grouping.

The means of infantry fire were organically broken down in such a way somewhat inharmonious in the three Army Corps, all the more serious drawback if the Army had had to operate reunited. In this way, the Great Units that composed it, having to be used in neighboring sectors, would probably have been faced with similar demands, either all on the plain, or all in a mountain environment.

Indeed, the Alpine Corps had 72 deaths of 81, against 153 of the II Army Corps and 189 of the XXXV -CSIR.

If it is considered that the Italian Infantry Divisions were operating in the framework of Large Units, including Germanic Divisions, the proportional mortar availability was even more sensitive, as the Allied Army Divisions possessed more of such weapons.

As for the anti-tank defense entrusted to infantry units, the limit of effectiveness, rather than the number of weapons, was in their performance. The 47/32 piece, while being a weapon of good ballistic quality, as has already been said, could not pierce the armor of most Soviet tanks.

Even for this armament, the Alpine Corps was less equipped with it than the II and XXXV - CSIR.

The provision of 47/32 pieces of the II Army Corps for anti-tank was 72 (in addition to 22 in the prevailing accompaniment function) (6); that of the XXXV - CSIR was 80 (plus 28 accompanying. "XXXV C.A. had lost the 8 pieces of the Croatian legion, substituted by the same number of the 272<sup>nd</sup> A/T cannon company and had also received the 8 pieces of the CC.NN. group "3 Gennaio". Instead, that of the Alpine Corps was limited to only 48 pieces of the two anti-tank companies assigned to each of the three Alpine Divisions (in addition to 24 assigned to the accompanying battalion for each Division,).

Assignment of 47 guns to units directly dependent on the Army Command, 28 in total, of which only 8 were allocated for defense of the *Vicenza* Division and 20 for the accompanying (12 for the two *Vicenza* regiments and 8 for the *Vicenza* Croatian Legion) would not change the reasoning, even if they computed the other 19 semoventi pieces of the XIII Group of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division, bound to the particular action of the tank combat.

The supporting structure of the anti-tank, however, was made up of the 90 artillery guns destined for it, which is said later and that, combined with infantry, if deployed in areas of size consonant with the organic possibilities of the Italian Great Units and their tactical doctrine, could have achieved better results (7).

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(6) The difference between the two functions consisted of shooting targets that determined the choice of the type of ammunition to be used. The normal accompanying arms shooting was normally carried out against targets within two kilometers even if the maximum throw was 3,500 meters. The anti-tank should have been carried out at close distances of less than 1,000 meters and the maximum of 7,000 meters obtained from special shells was only the effect of the higher initial speed of the projectile.

(7) The defensive sectors of the Italian Divisions on the Don had amplitudes of some thirty kilometers, while the tactical doctrine of the era assigned to an Infantry Division, in flat ground, defensive areas ranging from three to five kilometers.

While the Great Units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army were deploying on the Don, the General Staff of the German Army (OKH), in the name of the Quartermaster General (Deputy Chief of the General Staff), General Blumentritt, pointed to the Military Attaché in Berlin the insufficiency of the 47 mm.gun against medium tonnage tanks and the good results achieved by the Germans using 76 mm guns.

When the Supreme Command was then aware of the low density of the Italian deployment on Don, in Rome, there was justified concern that the anti-tank defense, although increased by the German side with the cession of the 54 pieces of 75/39, was still insufficient.

The Supreme Command turned to the Army Chief of Staff, so that the provision of suitable anti-tank arms would be increased, provided that the African front was not reduced, but nothing could be done. It is also proven from this circumstance that it was difficult for Italy to conduct a modern war on multiple fronts.

As far as artillery is concerned, its quantitative increase was related to that of the Great Units present on the Russian front.

The organic constitution of an Army involved the assignment of artillery units.

The 9th Artillery Regimental Group of the Army, consisting of six groups, of which the LXXIII of 210/22 (8), XXXI, XXXII and XXXIV of 149/40 (9), XXIV and the L of 149/28 (10) cannons, with its set of guns, relevant for the power of their shots and ranges, offered the commander the possibility of mass-use or assigning substantial reinforcements to the employed Great Units, especially if the breadth of the fronts on which they were called to operate had allowed the overlapping of the areas of action of the various groups

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(8) Three batteries. Maximum throw 15,400 meters. Modern manufactured weapon, equipped with powerful shells. His batteries were assigned to groups of 149/40, thus forming mixed-caliber groups that were decentralized to the Army Forces.

(9) Each of three batteries, equipped with pure modern weapons with the maximum throw of 23,700 meters, which was rarely used completely, due to the difficulty of observing the shot from the ground, and therefore effectively directing it. Very few times it was possible to implement aero-cooperation for aerial observation of the shots.

(10) Krupp manufacture arms, sold by Germany. Maximum throw 13,300 meters.

(including those of the Army Corps and Divisions) and the maneuvering of trajectories.

For the 201<sup>st</sup> motorized artillery regiment, with three groups (nine batteries) armed with modern 75/32 cannons, was provided with a limited use in anti-tank function (11).

Also the horse artillery regiment, with all its contemporary possibilities and limitations of use, had gone into units directly dependent on the Army Command, along with the Cavalry grouping with which it was part.

The reinforcement of 75/46 anti-tank batteries, 4 to 13 (five groups) was roughly proportional to the overall increase in the Army's strength, while the allocation of only 4 20 mm anti-aircraft batteries was relatively low.

The CSIR artillery facility has been said, so for the Army Corps, as for Divisions, even after the 3rd *Celere* which was organically transformed. Framed in the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and became the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, the Army Artillery Command ruled that the three 105/32 groups of the 30<sup>th</sup> grouping would be reinforced by a group of 149/13 howitzer, the direct availability of artillery groups between the three Army Corps. The CSIR Divisions remained the weakest point of an armament made up of antiquated model guns.

The II Corps was the best one provided with organically assigned artillery. The 2<sup>nd</sup> regimental group, while being reduced by transferring a group from 149/13 to the CSIR's 30<sup>th</sup> group, consisted of two groups of 105/28 (12) and two by 149/13 (13). In the Divisions, the Divisional artillery regiments were formed by two groups of 75/18 (14) howitzers and a group of 105/28 cannons.

It can be seen that for both the II Army Corps and the other two, there were no 75/46 counter-aircraft batteries in the artillery. The supply of two batteries of 20 mm. of the Army Corps and two others in each of the Divisions did not guarantee that enemy overruns could be effectively countered.

The Alpine Corps, with the 11<sup>th</sup> artillery group, had received three cannons of 105/32 (repeating

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(11) Modern manufactured weapon. Maximum throw of 11,500 meters.

(12) Weapon manufactured prior to 1915. Maximum throw of 13,650 meters.

(13) Weapon manufactured before 1915. Maximum throw of 8,800 meters.

(14) Modern manufactured weapon. Maximum throw of 9,500 meters.

the disadvantages of the same pieces assigned to the CSIR) and a group of 149/13. In each of the three Alpine Divisions, the material of the two groups of 75/13 mule packed (15) responded to the operational need of the Alpine battalions in impenetrable areas, but it was still old-fashioned. The mule packed 105/11 (16) howitzers of the divisional artillery regiment, endowed with good weapons in itself, was, however, made up of only two batteries.

All nine Divisions of the Army Corps, just arrived in Russia, had been equipped with six pieces of 75/39 97-38, pre-war French weapon, distributed by the Germans. With those weapons and staff from the munitions and food units of the divisional artillery regiments, batteries were designed to carry out only anti-tank action, similar to those of the 201<sup>st</sup> regiment. The availability of these guns in anti-tank function, added to that of the 201<sup>st</sup> regiment arms, gave way to greatly enhancing the limited action of the 47/32 pieces.

In the Army there were still seven batteries of 65/17 (17) howitzers, assigned as accompany batteries to the infantry regiments 37<sup>th</sup> (*Ravenna* Division), 53<sup>rd</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup> (*Sforzesca* Division), 79<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> (*Pasubio* Division), 89<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> (*Cosseria* Division).

The *Vicenza* Division, the last in Russian territory destined to serve as an occupation, had not been assigned any artillery units, even armed with 20 pieces for counter-aircraft defense.

The overall strength of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army guns is thus divided by caliber:

65/17 of accompanying weapons, mule packed	n. 28
20 mm A/A (18)	“ 224
75/46 A/A	“ 52
75/32 motorized A/T	“ 36
75/39 A/T	“ 54
	276
	90

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(15) Weapon manufactured before 1915 of Austro-Hungarian war booty. Maximum throw 8,250 meters.

(16) Modern weapon of French war booty. Maximum 7,250 meters.

(17) Weapon manufactured prior to 1915, distributed to consumption and replaced with the 47/32 cannon, assigned to the infantry. Maximum throw 6,500 meters.

(18) The 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division also had the 31 guns of 20 mm. of the LXVII armored battalion, but the tactical use features of those weapons mean that they can not be considered among the artillery units.

75/13 mule packed (alpine divisions).	n. 72
75/18 motorized (infantry divisions II C.A.).	“ 72
75/27 1911 motorized (Infantry Divisions XXXV Corps).	“ 72
75/27 mod. 1912 on horseback.	“ 24
100/17 motorized (Infantry divisions XXXV Corps).	“ 36
105/11 mule packed (Alpine divisions).	“ 24
105/28 Motorized (II Corps. and Divisions)	” 60
105/32 motorized (XXXV Corps. and Alpine Corps)	“ 72
149/13 Motorized of the Army	” 48
149/28 Motorized of the Army	“ 24
149/40 Motorized of the Army	” 36
210/22 Motorized of the Army	“ 12
for a total of 946 pieces, framed in 204 batteries.	

But, as a whole, 28 pieces were bound to the accompanying action of individual infantry regiments, 276 against the counter-terrorist action (for which they did not even appear abundant), 90 to the counter-air action (which employed them in a fractional division, more like that of infantry weapons, that is suitable to carry out also the artillery's own actions).

For these, 552 non-modern munitions were available, with various ammunition, but which, if used according to the doctrine nominally in force (and not so well implemented on the Russian front), could equally offer effective infantry cooperation (19).

The distribution of gun caliber and for Large Units is found in *Document No. 56*.

The supply of artillery guns had been considerably increased. In general, this increase was also 369%.

The new specialty of the anti-tank artillery had been inserted, and the supply of medium-sized guns (unusually assigned to the divisional regiments of the II Army Corps and the Alpine Army Corps) had determined a specific increase of 766%, obvious detriment to other fronts of the war.

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(19) See. note 6, p. 189.

Armored vehicles were of a different type from those assigned to CSIR. Although it was no longer the tiny L/3 tanks, on the whole of the not much more powerful 31 L/6 tanks and the 19 47/32 semoventi tanks was less than the number of 60 tanks of the CSIR.

The division of chemical troops between the Army Corps of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army also included a peculiarity. Established the criterion that most of those units were centered on the Army Command and that there was only one company in the Army Corps for any unverified, defensive needs, it was extraordinary the block assignment to the II Army Corps with only two flamethrower companies sent to the Russian front.

On the other hand, the provision of aircraft was diminished, not only in proportional but even absolute value, being reduced by 21%.

The percentage increase in force in men (*Document No. 57*) was approximately 369%, but the total armament of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army infantry was less than that of CSIR; in fact for all types of infantry the increase did not reach 300%.

During the preparation period in Italy, between February and May, all units undertook training to train for long and prolonged walking marches, to consider situations of movement war, waterway passage, the use of means in the combat of arrest and the operation of armored vehicles. However, the physical aspect of the region and the duty to respect the needs of the dense agricultural crops existing in the Po Valley, where almost all units were located to the Russian front, set strong limits on the realism of training.

The experience gained by the German Army in the first weeks of the war, and of which the Italian Army of the Italian Army had been informed, had led to training standards issued by the central offices, straight to the minor units (*Document No. 58*). The winter season, the crisis suffered by the German Great Units, the CSIR intervention in the active autumn and winter operations, had provided other experiences, which had also been part of the party to provide up-to-date training guidelines for units destined for the Russian front.

Another need was the prophylactic vaccination, made to confer immunity against tetanus and the most common infectious diseases.

The departing units were visited by the highest state authorities on the occasion of the delivery of rewards to the flags and individual military forces to reward for valor during the previous participation in operations on other fronts. Indeed, all divisions were not at their first experience in the ongoing war.

On June 2, 1942, when the first departures of the units destined to constitute the Army were forthcoming, General Messe was received by Mussolini, to whom he expressed the previously expressed hierarchical opinion that the sending of a whole Army to the Russian front was a mistake.

The CSIR Commander believed that nearly a year's war experience at the Russian front had demonstrated how poor and old-fashioned armaments, the lack of suitable armored vehicles, the insufficient amount of vehicles, the serious logistical problems that depend on supplies and especially in relation to the continuing misunderstandings manifested by the German side to our needs, were all enough to induce the Italian contingent to not increase on the Russian front, especially because of the danger that possible negative events would cause the good name of the Italian soldier to fail.

Mussolini confirmed his own view that Italy should not be less than other minor allies and that it should be alongside Germany on that front, as Germany cooperated in Africa, and because, in his view, the destinies of the two Nations were mutually linked. Lastly, he was hoping to take advantage of Italy at the end for peace, greater benefit from the presence of an Army rather than that of one Army Corps (20).

In the first week of June, departures began for the departing units directly from Army, the II Corps and the Quartermaster. It was determined that the Alpine Army Corps would move last.

## 2. – TRANSFER (*Drawing No 20*)

In the vicissitudes of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, between the phases of the constitution and the gathering, is included the transfer of the Great Units constituted in Italy and not yet present at the Russian front,

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(20) MESSE: op. cit., Ed. June 1947, p. 177-179.



as was the CSIR already, that of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was the first block.

This was one of the peculiarities in the constitution of the Army, which, as it was formed in the national territory, already had its third part engaged in war in a distant theater of operations.

Among the major Italian and German states, the modalities for the rail transport of the other two Army Corps were agreed, as well as the units directly subordinate to the Army Command and those of the Quartermaster, and regulated the composition of the convoys and the their succession over time.

The German authority had, however, notified the Italian railway, only to Brest Litovsk (21). The reserve was motivated by the fact that the railway organization of the occupied territories was able to determine the subsequent routing of the convoys according to the situation of the moment, taking into account operational requirements as well (22).

A different block of railway convoys, destined for the vehicle or motorized cargo (about 2,500 vehicles), would have reached Silesia in Troppau (23), where the units would continue to travel normally for about 1,500 kilometers to the Ukraine (24).

Only when the first convoys had departed from Italy at the beginning of the second week of June on the insistent requests of the Quartermaster, which was preparing to serve the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, the German Commanders informed that the II Corps with troops and armed services, it would be unloaded in the southwestern area of Karkov, located about 240 kilometers north of Stalino, and then completely detached from the area of operations of the CSIR. For the Alpine Corps, destined for departure from Italy from mid-July, a third

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(21) Brennero - Innsbruck - Munich - Augsburg - Nuremberg - Balle - Kottbus - Sagan - Glogau - Lissa - Lietzmannstadt - Warsaw - Siedlce - Brest Litovsk.

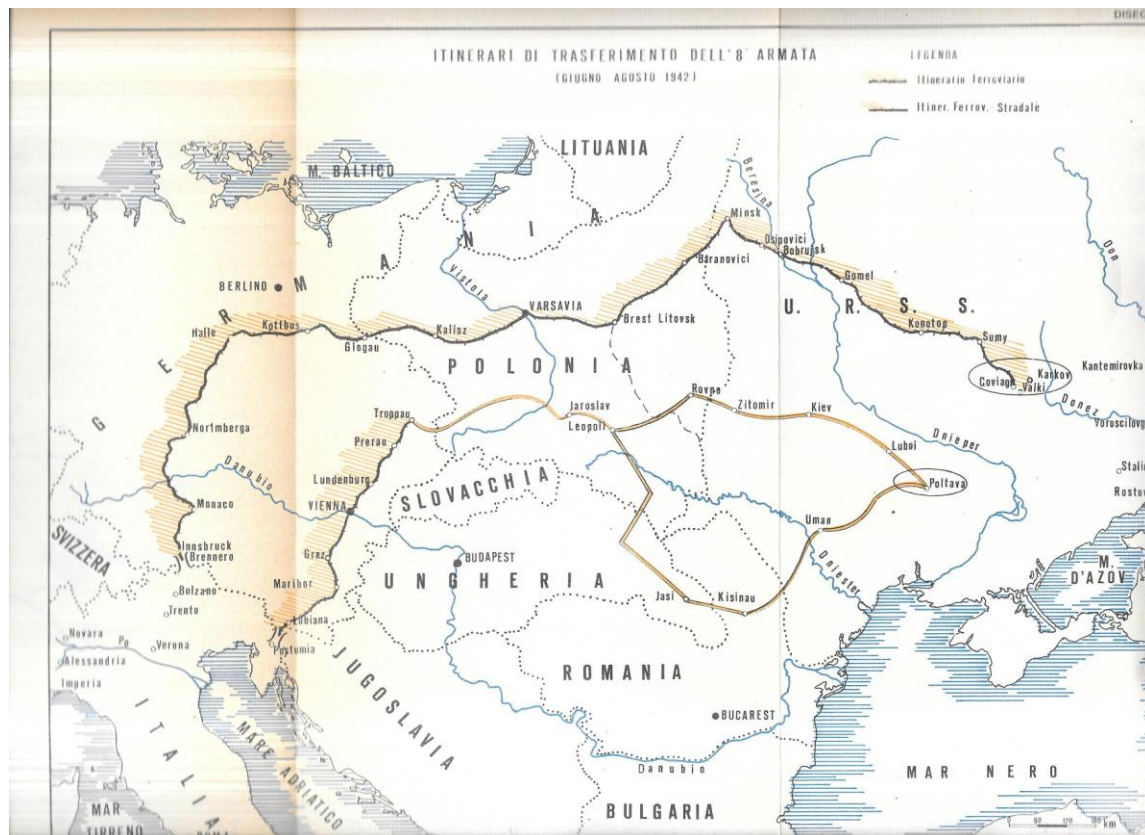
(22) In general, Brest Litovsk - Baranoviczi - Stolpcje - Minsk - Ossipiovici - Shlobin - Comel - Konotop - Sumy - Aktirka - Viron - railway stations in the south and southwestern part of Karkov.

(23) The itinerary was followed: Postumia - Ljubljana - Marburg - Graz - Vienna - Lundenburg - Prerau - Troppau - Jagerndorf (for 800 kilometers).

(24) Troppau - Jaroslav - Leopoli - Rovno - Zitomir - Darniza (near Kiev) - Lubni - Poltava. The 10th Arm Arm Group

On the other hand, the railway was started on the railway route through Romania, for Jasi - Kisinai, continuing on a regular basis to Urnan and Poltava.

## Map 20



a gathering area north of Taganrog (Azov Sea) and west of the Mius River, as that Large Unit would be destined to operate in the Caucasus.

To meet the needs arising from the unprecedented situation a twofold order of measures was implemented.

First of all, the Quartermaster provided timely to the Units and Commanders who landed at the railway stations of the Karkov suburbs and the nearest places.

Subsequently, the Commander of the Army took appropriate action in order to maintain the commitments assumed for the unitary use. He worked to ensure that the effort made by Italy with the preparation of an Army would be conveniently considered and would not be dispersed in three minor ways, without the assurance that no further divisions would have occurred, as a fact already foresaw: the *Ravenna* Division, formerly of the II Army Corps, had been employed in the second rank, which was placed in large German units, taking its position in the northwestern area of Lozovaja.

The action of General Gariboldi achieved the desired success, and no mention was made of Caucasus destinations and future prospects for the Middle East. Indeed, the organic constitution of the Army, its armaments, and the lack of motorization of its combat units would all be considered as positives for the use of Italian units in the mountainous area.

Between 17 June and 7 July, in the Karkov area, a significant fraction of the II Corps came in. The Command, with almost all the directly dependant Units (11,000 men out of 13,000) (25), the whole of the *Ravenna* Division (13,000 men), about half of the *Sjorzesca* Division (6,000 men of 13,000) (26). On average 30,000 men of the 52,000 constituents of the Army Corps.

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(25) The II machine gun battalion of Corps, the II sappers infantry battalion, the 2<sup>nd</sup> chemical company, the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> "flamethrower" company, the 4<sup>th</sup> recuperation company and some elements of the Services.

(26) Command of the Divisional Infantry, 5<sup>th</sup> CC.RR section, 54<sup>th</sup> *Umbria* infantry regiment, part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> mortar battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> A/T cannon company of 47/32, the second group of 75/18 of 17<sup>th</sup> Divisional artillery regiment, 53<sup>rd</sup> 20 A/A battery, 6<sup>th</sup> health section, subsistence section, heavy truck, 192<sup>nd</sup> heavy truck, ambulances and water tankers, and part of the fuel and lubrication units.

On June 23rd the notice of the transfer from the Karkov area to that of Stalino was issued and the itineraries were established to carry it out,

The Commander of the Army had obtained that the II Corps approach in the area of Donez at the XXXV, which was already in operation, so that the constitution of the Army, to which the Commander did not delay to take over the Command, even before the gathering of it had been completed.

In fact, if the two Army Corps did not meet to pursue operations in the next summer cycle, and if the Army Commander had not actually exercised his hierarchical and service authority over them, it should have been limited to merely inspecting functions on three isolated Army Corps, embedded in Germanic armies, which would employ them according to their respective needs.

The Army Command issued a transfer notice for the units of the II Army Corps arrived or arriving in the Karkov area, while simultaneously diverting as many possible convoys as possible, directing them to the Stalino - Gorlovka area.

The movement took place between June 28 and July 6, on two different routes:

a) *western route for motorized units*: Karkov - Krasnograd - Novomoskovsk - Pavlograd - Petropavlovka - Mescevaja - Novo Pavlovka (or Griscino) with a development of about 500 km. On this itinerary should also be entered the vehicles not strictly necessary for the units that carried out the walking. It would have been a total mass of about 6,000 vehicles. In addition, that road would also have been driven by the motorized units discharged from the trains in Troppau and who, for Poltava, had made the trip by routine;

b) *eastern route for walking units*: Karkov - Staroverovka - Jefremovka - Krasnopavlovka - Vesselaja - Lozovaja - Diakovo - Osidschij - Petropavlovka - Mescevaja - Novo Pavlovka (or Griscino) with a development of about 330 km. This route was traveled by the entire *Ravenna* Division (which had been deployed in the Lozovaja area), from combat baggage of the *Sjorzesca* Division and of the 23 *Marzo* Group and of the non-motorized Corp units.

The itinerary for walking units was shorter than the one assigned to the motorized units, but had the disadvantage of crossing an even warmer area of combat, which almost finished the mopping up. In fact, the German operations for the elimination of the main Soviet forces locked in the Izjum (or Lozovaja) pocket had lasted from 17 to 30 May and the sweep was completed only on 26 June.

### 3. – WORK

The inflow of units from the Karkov railway discharge area and that of trains still arriving from Italy, which was gradually being implemented at the rear of CSIR in the Stalino - Gorlovka area, determined the work phase of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

In anticipation of the imminent offensive recovery, the Commander of the Army reinforced the CSIR artillery, since Italian intervention in war actions would at that time be limited, as has been said, to the participation of only the XXXV Army Corps.

At the same time he transferred from II to XXXV Army Corps of the *Sforzesca* Division, which came fresh from Italy, although veteran of other war operations, replacing one of the two transportable Divisions, which then turned out to be the *Torino*.

Finally, he removed from the CSIR the mounted group (*Savoia Cavalleria*, *Lancieri di Novara* and horse artillery regiment) and the *Monte Cervino* Alpine skier battalion, and moved them to the direct dependency of the Army Command.

On July 15, arrived at the Gorlovka Railway Station was also on the *Cosseria* Division, which the Army Command retained at its disposal.

The Alpine Corps was still located in Italy, except for the 11<sup>th</sup> artillery group that had already moved to Russia and was destined for use in the next breakthrough operation of the Soviet front.

## CHAPTER X

### OPERATIONS IN THE MIUS MINERAL BASIN (KRASNYI LUCH)

#### 1. - THE PREPARATIONS

The fall of Sevastopol into German hands (June 30) completed the Crimean conquest and ended laying the groundwork for the Germanic summer offensive against the USSR.

Meanwhile, from the second decade of June, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army (1) was gathering at the Russian front.

General Gariboldi's assumption of command of the Army - although the Great Unit was not yet complete - had the essential purpose of proclaiming to the local German Commanders the intention to exercise an effective action on the united Army, as Hitler had promised him in an interview in April at the German Headquarters.

The II Corps was also in a crisis of movement, not only from the Karkov area initially foreseen for its gathering, the new one established in Donetsk's mining area, but even not having completed the railway movement of the *Cosseria* Division from Italy and because the units of the *Sforzesca* had been discharged from the trains part in one and part of the other gathering area. Therefore, the II Corps was not readily usable, at least for the most part.

In this situation, the Commander of the Army decided that the first operations of the offensive takeover were conducted by only the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, still included in the 17<sup>th</sup> German Army, which, in view of its future strategic tasks, was transforming into the Group of Armies "A", to the Command of the Marshall List.

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(1) Rail transport from Italy of the Alpine Army began on July 14th. Of that Large Unit was only the 11<sup>th</sup> Art. Regimental Grouping in the Russian Front at the beginning of July.

The XXXV Army Corps would have been appropriately reinforced by the assignment of an Infantry Division (*Sforzesca*) just arrived from Italy with the intact forces, from the 111<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Division and the constitution of a strong mass of medium artillery caliber to facilitate a foreseeable breakthrough action by which the objective of the right bank of Donez was to be achieved and also received reinforcement of the Cavalry Regimental Group (with limits on employment) and the alpine ski battalion *Monte Cervino*.

The German offensive in the summer, open to the northern wing from June 28, was extending southwards.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Army reached the Don in the Voronez area on July 5th and, descending along the right bank of the river, left behind a shadowy occupation of defense, coordinating its movement with that of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, which was doing it on a slightly moved west line.

It was also time for the Army Group "A" to act at the right wing of all deployment in the Caucasus.

The CSIR, with its 17<sup>th</sup> Army, was in a state of resuming operations, examining the various possibilities that were going on.

The favorable performance of the German actions between Donez and Don, in the Karkov area, could have foretold that Soviet units opposed to the Italians did not want to be trapped from behind and intend to join their mass on the left of Don.

But it could not be ruled out the opposite possibility of a desperate Russian resistance in the country, meant to distract forces from the great German offensive.

This second hypothesis, such as the one that was most difficult for the CSIR Large Units, had to be conveniently studied and that study had to come up with concrete operational provisions, so that the adversary's intentions would not have a positive result.

The Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army could intervene only by strengthening the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR and, as already mentioned, was reinforced by the *Sforzesca* Division and a considerable medium-sized artillery mass which would have benefited from the cooperation with infantry intended to attack Soviet positions throughout the winter.

While the Italian divisions deployed on the front of the CSIR retained the availability of divisional artillery and those assigned in reinforcement (in total 18 groups, with 51 batteries and 204 small and medium-sized pieces), the Army Command assigned to reinforce the CSIR all artillery other units with which two masses of maneuver would have been formed to cooperate with the two wings for the attack:

- "*north*" *maneuvering mass* (2 groups of 105/28 and 2 groups of 149/13 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regimental group artillery of the II Army Grorp, for a total of 12 batteries and 48 pieces) at the commander's orders of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regimental group, to support the action of the German Infantry Division, which maintained the direct availability of its organic artillery (3 groups of 105);

- "*south*" *maneuvering mass* (3 groups of 105/32 and 149/13 group of 11<sup>th</sup> artillery Regimental grouping of the Alpine Corps, in addition to another 149/13 group of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regimental grouping and a 149/40 cannon group of the 9<sup>th</sup> Regimental Group of the Army, for a total of 18 batteries and 72 pieces) at the commander of the 11<sup>th</sup> Regimental grouping.

With the action of this artillery mass, it would also have to be coordinated with organic artillery and assigned to reinforcement at the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division (the 100/17 group and 2 75/27 cannon groups of the 120<sup>th</sup> artillery regiment, the 105/32 cannon group of the 30<sup>th</sup> Corps grouping and the 75/27 cannon gun artillery group, with 2 batteries) at the orders of the commander of divisional artillery. This would have been said to be a "Lightweight Grouping", to distinguish it from the previous "Regimental Grouping of the Army Corps". The action of one and the other would be coordinated by the Commander of the South Caucasus maneuver, General Adriano Perrod, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Artillery Command.

A similar concentration of artillery units (31 groups, with 90 batteries and 360 guns) on the front of a single Army Corps was the strongest obtained at the Russian front by Italian artillery (*Document No. 59*)

The two operational events of the break-through of the line held by the Russians or the voluntary withdraw of Soviet units were considered in two distinct directives issued by the Commander of the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR on July 9 and 10 (*Documents 60 and 61*).



As a result of those provisions:

- the *Sforzesca* Division replaced the *Pasubio* Division and part of the Torino Division in the middle of the lineup, while reliving the elements already assigned to reinforcing the *Pasubio*;
- the *Pasubio* Division, shutting it to the left, partially replaced the German 111<sup>th</sup> Division, intended to act as the left branch of the designed pincer;
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division, already reinforced by the CC.NN. *Tagliamento* group and the Croatian Legion, would have left these reinforcement units in the winter positions, which would thus pass to the direct dependence of the Army Corps. The *Celere* Division, with its own organic units, would constitute the right branch of the pincer.

It was foreseen that the new deployment could be implemented by July 14th. The Army Corps commanded the emanation of further and more precise orders.

The XXXV Army Corps - CSIR would operate on the left (north) of the German LII Corps and on the right (south) by the XLIX Alpine Army Corps also German (198<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division").

## 2. – OPERATIONS

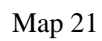
(*Drawing No 21*)

In the morning of July 11<sup>th</sup>, the Command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division has two exploratory forces in the field, the first led by the Croatian Legion, on the ridge of hill 253.4 towards Vessieli, and the second by the LXIII CC.NN. battalion (*Tagliamento* group ) on the village of Nikitino, both in order to ascertain the situation and, winning the resistance of any advanced enemy elements, to provide good starting bases for the next push.

The two actions, validly endorsed by the Division's artillery, get full and rapid success, and in the evening itself, orders for offensive action can be issued.

At 03:30 on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri regiment (column Caretto), reinforced by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri motorcycle company and a 75/27 cannon group of the 120<sup>th</sup> artillery regiment, leaving Nikitino and Vessieli occupied by the forces that

## Map 21



had seized it the day before, marching in two columns: on the left the XX battalion and the 3rd motorcycle company on the railway station of Fatscevk, to the right the XVIII battalion on hill 333.5 (Mogila Ostraja).

The bulk of the Division close within a short distance in four echelons, in the two directions mentioned.

A violent thunderstorm, however, deeply soaking the ground, prevents the movement of motor vehicles and strongly slows down that of men on foot. Rearguard resistances and obstacles crafted skillfully by the enemy, especially minefields, further undermine advanced, while the divisional reserve stands in the Krugli area.

The Commander of the Division creates that at 18:00 a new formation (Column Salvatores: VI Bersaglieri battalion of the 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment, XLVII Bersaglieri motorcycle battalion, a 100/17 group of the 120<sup>th</sup> artillery) pushes to Petrovenki, overcoming with the elements of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri. After the dusk the new column is stopped by a strong resistance to the height of the Artema crossroads. The action does not continue, despite maintaining contact with the enemy and establishing the connection with the lateral German units, to the left in Utkino with the 308<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (111<sup>th</sup> Division) and right with 217<sup>th</sup> (198<sup>th</sup> Division).

For the day of July 13, the Commander of the Army Corps, in harmony with the plan of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army, orders that the *Celere* move on Scevskenko - Malaja Nikolaievka and Ivanovka - Krasnaja Poljana, to prevent the enemy from withdrawing orderly and its eventual defense organization on the front Voroscilovgrad (today Lugansk) - Krasnyj Luch.

The *Pasubio* and *Sforzesca* divisions, in the second rank, would follow the eastward movement.

Therefore, the Commander of the *Celere* orders that the Salvatores column, by eliminating the resistances of the Artema crossroads, occupy the railway station of Petrovenki (occupied then at 11:00) and moves on Krasnaja Poljana.

The exploratory elements report that Scevskenko, on the left, is heavily occupied, while on the right, at hill 367.1, strong rearguards have arrested units of the German 198<sup>th</sup> Division. The German Commander asks for the Italian aid and the VI Bersaglieri battalion conquers the height.

In the evening, as the Italian units stand on the positions won, the bulk of the Division stands in two columns at the height of the Kommendantski railway station.

In the following night strong Russian cavalry units, supported by intense artillery fire and mortars, attack hill 367.1. The Italian garrison reacts with counterattack and rejects the enemy, who leaves many dead and injured on the ground.

At the first lights of July 14, the action was resumed.

The 111<sup>th</sup> German pushes to Jelisabetovka and Malaja Nikolaievka. Pasubio is urged to intervene between 111<sup>th</sup> and the *Celere*.

The latter, at 03:30, with the VI Bersaglieri battalion, supported by the III horse artillery group, having approached the favor of darkness, attacks surprisingly, hill 360.2, a determining factor for the next advancement on Ivanovka. In half an hour it gained momentum, suffering significant losses, capturing more than 200 prisoners and a lot of booty.

To continue the action, the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division implements this device:

- *in the first echelon*: XIII/6<sup>th</sup> (left) and XIX/6<sup>th</sup>, respectively supported by the I and II of the 120<sup>th</sup> artillery group;
- *in second echelon*: VI/6<sup>th</sup>;
- *in divisional reserve*: 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri regiment, with a battalion available to the 6<sup>th</sup>;
- the remaining artillery units (III/120<sup>th</sup> and III Horse group of 105 and a 149/13 group) would move their deployment forward;
- XLVII Bersaglieri motorcyclist battalion, to protect the right flank, south of Petrovenki.

At 06:00 the attack began, strongly opposed by the Soviet infantry, supported by artillery fire, mortar and "katjusce", deployed on deep positions, crossed by cross-links, mined fields and anti-tank ditches. Attacker losses are considerable.

The persistence of resistance determines the request of the German aviation air aid. A misunderstanding in the determination of the objectives means that a first Stukas squadron, taking into consideration only the yellow sheets displayed on German trucks and not the Italian regulatory ones also exposed, let go of their bombs on the Bersaglieri. These were established in the enemy trenches already conquered and the losses are limited to about twenty injured. The fact is repeated with the second squadron causing a dozen injured. The third squadron, able to warn at the right time, finally strikes the enemy's positions.

They go in action the XIII/6<sup>th</sup>, the XXV/3<sup>rd</sup> and the XIX/6<sup>th</sup>, the VI/6<sup>th</sup>. Between 08:00 and 09:00 Ivanovka is conquered after a

house to house fight. The enemy retreats to the hills east of the inhabited area and keeps it under the fire of artillery, mortars and "katjusce", while the usual mines are deployed in the field.

On the left wing of the XXXV Corps, 111<sup>th</sup> German Division occupied Malaja Nikolaievka, but on the right wing the 198<sup>th</sup> Division (XLIX German Army Corps) had been arrested in its attack, revealing the right flank of the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR.

Meanwhile, the *Pasubio* and *Sforzesca* Divisions closed up.

The bulk of XXXV Army Corps was now penetrated into the Russian defensive system on the Voroscilovgrad-Krasnyj Luch line.

To the right of the Italian Army Corps, the XLIX German Army Corps, having to go south-east, following its 198<sup>th</sup> Division, would have left the CSIR flank uncovered, exposing it to any offense coming from the intricate mining area of Krasnyj Luch. Therefore, the XXXV Corps Commander deployed, as a cover, the cavalry grouping.

At first, the Command of the 3rd *Celere* Division had deployed, in the sector already occupied by the 198<sup>th</sup> Division, the *Tagliamento* and the Croatian Legion. These two units remained in the positions occupied by the 198<sup>th</sup> Division and were included in the *Pasubio* Division .

On the days of July 15 and 16, the eastward movement was suspended, so that the ArmyCorps could be reordered.

On the ground in the two sectors held by *Celere* and the German 198<sup>th</sup>, on the day of the 17<sup>th</sup>, *Pasubio* and *Sforzesca* would be deployed, while the units that had replaced the 198<sup>th</sup> would have changed employment dependency, remaining on occupied positions and be passed by the *Pasubio*.

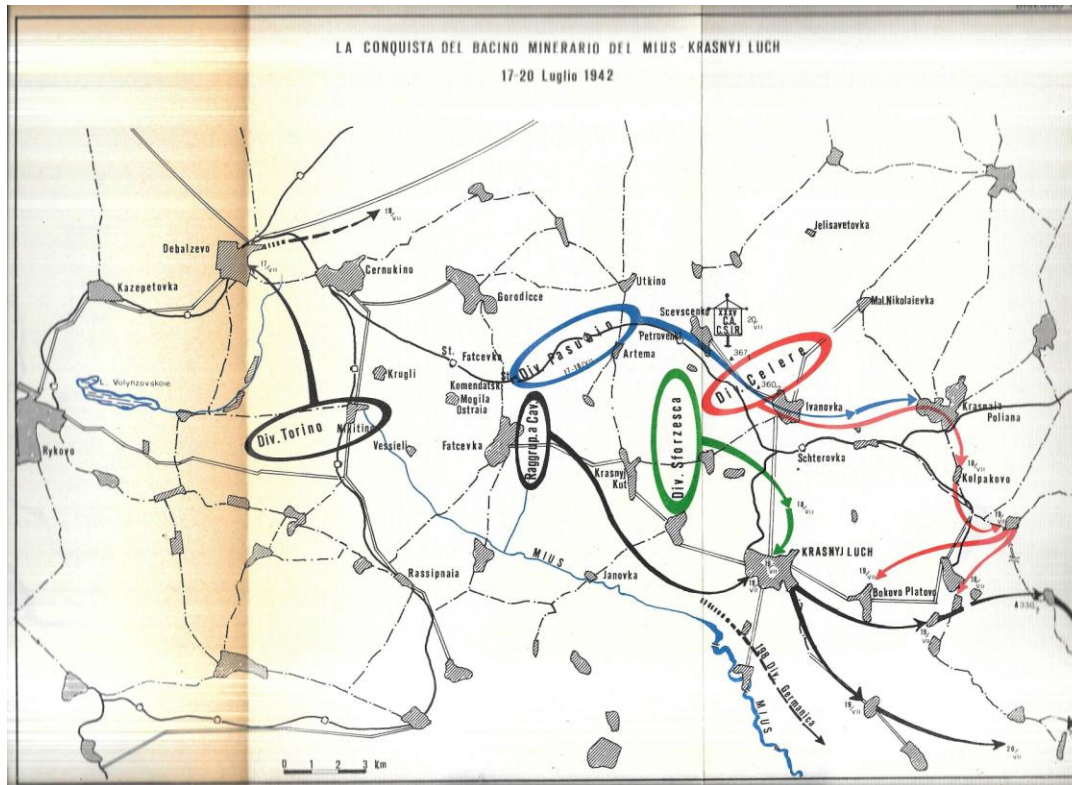
At 07:00 on July 17 (*Drawing No 22*), Krasnyj Kut's operational responsibility was assumed by the Command of the *Sforzesca* Division, which was recognized by the 198<sup>th</sup> German Division.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division was thus released from the sectors responsibility and resumed its hand to be readily usable in a probable exploitation of success.

During the whole day of the 17th, the exploration always struck a strong reaction from the enemy, indeed, in the area of the 111<sup>th</sup> Division, attempted an attack with tanks, which was rejected. It was an action taken to facilitate the break of the contact, as they indicated the same 111<sup>th</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere*.

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map 22



The Army Group "A" Command ordered that on the following day the XXXV Corps should push to Krasnaja Poljana and Rovenki. These two goals were assigned respectively to the *Pasubio* and *Celere*, while the *Sforzesca*, for the Krasnyj Luch ridge, would advance on Bokovo Platovo. The Cavalry grouping on, crossing Krasnyj Luch's mining-industrial center from the south, would push to Bokovo Platovo..

The bulk of Soviet forces were folding toward Donez, protected by strong rearguards.

On the day of July 18, the uninterrupted bad weather made the movement of walking units uncomfortable and prevented that of motor vehicles.

The 111<sup>th</sup> Division, having been transferred to the dependency of the III German Army Corps, left the XXXV - CSIR.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* occupied Scterovka, Kolpakovo and Krasnaja Poljana, reached in the evening by the *Pasubio*.

The *Sforzesca*, after Krustalinj, continued on to hill 347.5, to the north near Krasnyj Luch.

The Cavalry Group, with a march of more than 60 kilometers made more tiring by the mud and slowed down by the presence of mined fields, reached in the evening the Krasnyj Luch's area after having made a large sweeping movement.

On that same evening, the German Command ordered that the XXXV Corps, instead of proceeding on Rovenki and then on the mouth of the Don, as previously made clear, would gather on Bokovo Platovo to sweep the intricate mining area.

On the days of 19, 20, 21 and 22 July, the area's rampage continued, without major resistance, with the capture of some 4,000 prisoners. The area was also reclaimed from the mined fields and the units were reorganized.

Exhausted the task, received on July 23 by order of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command, now fully operational, the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, heading north-east, headed to Luganskaja Bridge, on the Donez, near Vorosilovgrad.

While the CSIR changed its denomination and organization, including the operation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army as the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, the German Supreme Command expressed its appreciation for the military qualities highlighted by the Italian Expeditionary Corps during eleven months of war even in the toughest situations.

## CHAPTER XI

### MARCH TO DON. OPERATIONS IN THE BEND OF THE SERAFIMOVIC

#### 1. - MARCH TO DON

##### A) THE PASSAGE OF THE DONEZ

The columns of the units of the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR and the II Corps, which are part of those directly dependent on the Quartermaster and 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command, were merging on Vorosilovgrad just conquered by Germanic units, coming from the south respectively and from the west. Into the adjacent area of the city, the whole Italian Army was concentrated, for the first time becoming a concrete reality.

The Great Unit, though not yet complete in all the elements destined to form it, was now heading towards a large area of the right bank of Don, with the task of giving solidity to the veil of occupation left on that river by the German Army moving on Stalingrad and the Caucasian area.

The Command of the Army Group "A", on July 23, issued an order that had a rapid movement of Italian units towards Don, as well as for the passage of dependencies of 8<sup>th</sup> Army from one Army Group to another, destined to end with the inclusion in the Army Group "B" (*Document No 62*).

It was therefore necessary for the most agile Italian Divisions to pass through Donez promptly to help the German divisions, who were committed to securing the possession of Don's right bank.

The retreating Soviets had kept leaving behind all the bridges broken, the sabotaged railway lines, and the many mines of all kinds.



In order to reactivate the passage between the two banks of Donez was established the bridges of boats;

- Luganskaja, about fifteen kilometers north - west of Voroscilovgrad, just upstream of the confluence of Lugan (Donez right-hand side), on the road to Bielovodsk - Kantemirovka - Rossosc;

- Veselaja Gora, at a distance north of the city, just downstream of the confluence of Adar (left tributary), on the road to Starobelsk - Valuijki.

The throwing of the bridge at Luganskaja was of great urgency, as it was linked to operational needs, as well as logistics.

The task was assigned to the I Bridging Battalion, with two companies (taken from the Army), which was on July 22, located in Vodjanoj (Stalino area). The unit was assigned to reinforce the 21<sup>st</sup> heavy brige company of the IX Bridging Battalion, located at Ismajlovka (Stalino area), and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Company of the 15<sup>th</sup> Army Battalion (II Army Corps), located in Debalzevo, the latter with the task of preparing boat access ramps. Each Bridging company was equipped with a Mod. 2, Type B bridge, with a capacity of 14 tons and a length of 100 meters.

The ordinary movement should have started immediately so that the bridge could be transitable by July 25th. The column had been given precedence over any other.

The departure took place at 12:00 on the same day, but the movement was slow, as a result of the overcoming of many interruptions by the retreating enemy. The 220 kilometers between the two areas could only be covered in 24 hours, of which 12 are actually effective, as the column arrived at 12:00 on July 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Recognizing the need for the bridge to measure 140 m, the 1<sup>st</sup> company was set up and half of it was the 2<sup>nd</sup>. The work of the bridging engineers, which began at 15:00, ended at 18:00, while the bridge adjacent to it, its access and its outlet was carefully ransacked by the artisans, which removed numerous pressure and clockwork mines. The transit was open at 18:00. The first to pass was German columns.

The rapid execution of work, even if done in the absence of the enemy, demonstrates the high level of training achieved by

the crews who, shortly before, had known so valiantly fighting.

On July 24, in order to dispose of some of the intense traffic and to guarantee continuity of the passage, the other half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> company of the I battalion and 21<sup>st</sup>/IX were carrying a second bridge of about 300 meters upstream of the first began the discharge of the materials at 14:00 and started the throwing at 15:15, the bridge was open to traffic at 19:00.

In the days from July 23 to September 1942, eight Divisions, Troops and Services of two Army Corps and the Army were deployed on 37,000 military vehicles: trucks (with or without trailer), tractors of all types, jalopies, cars, animal tows, over tens of thousands of civilians with their cargo. The counterattack defense of the two bridges was entrusted to the IV group of 75/46.

In the early hours of the morning of July 26, the passage of the units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army to the Luganskaja Bridges began.

The movement, largely provided by a “translocation table”, drawn up by the Army Command, was thoroughly studied and organized in detail by all the Great Unit Commands called upon to do so. These commands, during the execution of the movements of the units that depended on them, were always represented on the bridges of officers belonging to their larger states.

The difficulties caused by the sandy bottom existing on the first ten kilometers of the track that moved away from the left bank of the river, initially made almost inconsistent with a thunderstorm that occurred on the night of July 26, led to the consequence that the transit of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division would protrude for some more hour. This delay was reflected in the movement of the units that followed. Although the conditions of the bottom were better after rain evaporation, the sandy nature of it never ceased to cause disadvantages, and the delays in the withdrawal times went down.

The Divisions of the XXXV Corps - CSIR transited with a full day of delay.

Lastly, the *Cosseria* Division (then temporarily under the direct command of the Army Command) passed between 02:00 and 08:30 on July 31<sup>st</sup>.

By the same day, the Donez passage was executed, according to forecasts.

## B) DEPLOYMENT ON THE DON

The intentions of the Army Group "B" Command about the use on the Don of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, with the main task of forming a defensive flank by deploying on that river, had been exhibited since July 25<sup>th</sup> to General Gariboldi. He was not enthusiastic about it (*Document No. 63*) even though he was offered to be included in the Great German Army Unit, while one of the three Italian Army Corps, the Alpine Corp, was to be set up to do so most important task in the Caucasus area, when it would be logical that the whole Army would be sent there.

General Gariboldi had expressed his grievances to the Supreme Command in a hierarchical way, but this had adhered to the vision expressed by the Head of Government: "Let the Command Act" (*Document No. 64*)

The paths carried out by the Great Units and all units from the CSIR areas during the winter campaign, or from the Mius - Krasnyj Luch area, where the most recent operations were taking place, or even from the II Army Corps forces and the new 8<sup>th</sup> Army Forces, had moved closer to Vorosilovgrad, until they gathered a short march from the Luganskaja bridges and the outflow from them.

They returned to east of Donez, headed for Bielovodsk for the II Corps (*Ravenna* and *Torino* Divisions), and Millerovo for the XXXV Corps- CSIR (*Sforzesca* and *Pasubio* Divisions), while the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere*, the true vanguard of the whole Army, had forged ahead and was already fighting on the Don, in the Serafimovic's (1) bend.

A fuel supply crisis delayed all movements, and only on August 4, the Great Units of the two Army Corps were attending the Rossosc - Millerovo railway, while the XXIX German Army Corps, already deployed on the right bank of the Don, waited the Italian Great Units to put them on the front and gradually transfer the Italian Army Corps to the operational responsibility of the lateral sectors, while maintaining the central sector, in turn joining the constitution of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

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(1) The fierce battles sustained by the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division in Serafimovic's loop, in support of the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army, are the subject of the final part of this chapter.

To get an idea of the average density of the XXIX Army Corps on the Don, just consider that it had to control a large 270-km area with three divisions (though ternary).

The phase of movement, known under the title of "march to Don", was developing as a complex strategic operation. In the course of its development, no phase was purely logistical, although tactical operations had only been limited to the participation of only the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, considerably reinforced, for the mining basin of Mius - Krasnyj Luch.

The crossing of recently occupied territories, which involved the removal of active and passive interruptions and obstacles, the sudden action of partisans and aviation began to create aversive tactical problems.

As of July 27, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command was directing the Great Units directly affiliated to it and the Army Commanders on the deployment that would be employed on the Don line:

- to the North the II Corps, which would have placed on its left wing the 336<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Division, besides the *Ravenna* and *Torino*;
- to the center of the German XXIX Corps, which would deploy its 62<sup>nd</sup> and 294<sup>th</sup> Divisions, receiving the Italian *Cosseria* Division;
- to the south the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, with the *Pasubio* and *Sforzesca* divisions;
- in reserve of the Army a fourth German Division and the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* (when it had completed the cycle of operations which had been scheduled to run with the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army") (*Document No 65*)

The Armed Forces to be deployed:

to the left: by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army;

to the right: by the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army.

The opponent, according to the information collected on the same date of July 27, would face the 8<sup>th</sup> Army with its own 63<sup>rd</sup> Army.

On 29 July, the Command of the Army Group "B" revoked the availability of the fourth German Infantry Division destined for

in reserve, confirming the temporary assignment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division to the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army.

The Army Command participated in the Armed Corps by providing them with new information on the general situation (soil and enemy), which they would find as soon as possible (*Document No. 66*) and July 31, "to allow troops less tedious marches and getting in line in better conditions", he urged the Commanders to regulate the "movement so as not to replace the in-line troops of the XXIX German Corps before the 8<sup>th</sup> of August."

If for the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR the deployment on the Don was only a change from one to the other operating sector, for the II Corps was the resumption of the warlike activity after a long period of time spent in national territory and after the units had been filled out with the entry of recruits provided by armed classes without war experience. The Commander of the Army Corps, General Giovanni Zanghieri, directed all the Great Unit on the situation to be faced and on the demands that came from it (*Document 67*)

On August 2, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command issued its orders for the replacement of the XXIX Corps of the German Army on the line of the Don, by the addition of the Italian divisions part of that command, then intended later to join Army itself.

Instead of replacing the German division with the reserve, the Army commanded a replacement replacing the II Army Corps with the 23 *Marzo* CC.NN Regimental Group, and specially removing the 201<sup>st</sup> motorized anti-tank artillery regiment, which had been particularly armed and trained to do just that fire action.

At the same time, the same Army Command brought to the attention of the Great Units Employed the criteria to which the Command of the Army Group wanted to be informed of Don's defense. Some key points were considered (*Document No. 68*):

- the long duration of the break, intended to include the season change;
- the size of the fronts allocated to the defense forces and, consequently,
- the discontinuity of the field works,
- the scarcity of forces,

- the forward projection of all units, such as to determine rigidity in the conduct of the defense,
- the exclusion of maneuvered defense.

In execution of the orders of the Army Command, on August 2, the Command of the XXIX Army Corps issued provisions for the replacement of units in the line.

Already on August 3, the Germanic orientations underwent a new variation, with the announced withdrawal from the line of the 62<sup>nd</sup> German Division, replaced on Don by Italian *Cosseria*.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, the XXIX Corps extended the new Operation Order no. 61, adding provisions to those given on August 2.

On August 7, the Command of the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, though not yet delivering a real Operation Order, provided orientations to the units assigned to its dependencies, not only on their respective sectors and on the division of the forces, but also on the situation in force at the sectoral limit with the XVII German Corps, which would soon result in significant consequences (*Document 69*)

Until 8 August, the command of the XXIX Corps had reported the importance of hill 220 of the Verhnij Mamon's loop, covered both for the sake of one or the other part, and the consequent danger that the Soviets, to whom it had just been removed, would try to regain it. The same German Command offered, as it was agreed, to leave for a while a reinforced infantry battalion of the 294<sup>th</sup> Division at the disposition of the *Ravenna* Division destined to take over in that sector, so that the Italian forces had the time to take good knowledge of the new positions and complete the defensive work.

On August 10<sup>th</sup>, the entire organization was subjected to a third variant: the 336<sup>th</sup> German Division, called to operate elsewhere, the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division would remain in the XXIX Corps, 294<sup>th</sup> would pass to the II Italian Corps.

Therefore on that same day, General von Obstfelder, Commander of the XXIX Army Corps, issued Operation Order no. 62 to make the new deployment.

According to the intentions expressed at that time by the German Commanders, it would have been possible for the Italian Army to rely on the presence in the rear of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division, destined to be located at the disposal of the Command of the Army Group "B".

In fact, that Division was stationed in the sector of the II Army Corps in the valley of Boguciar only for a few days of the late autumn, between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> defensive battle of the Don, immediately called to cooperate in the attempt to buffer the defeat on November 19, by the Soviets, in the rear of the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army.

It was a fundamental operational concept to develop a rigid defense on the banks of the river rather than on the dominant heights. For the first time, the establishment of “intervention groups”, such as mobile reserves, from the rear units, was considered for Italian units.

The deployment was implemented between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, as the change of the sector entrusted to the *Cosseria* from the Stogovsko-Abrossimova sector to Novaja Kalitva - Zapkovo - Dubovikof area involved this Division for a three-day trip.

The entire operation of the march from the Donazine basin to the banks of Don took place in such a way as to merit the praise of Marshal List, Commander of the Army Group "A", which oversaw most of the operation itself.

On August 13, after completing the complex movement, General Italo Gariboldi assumed the operational responsibility of the entire 8<sup>th</sup> Army sector, from Pavlovsk (Kolkoz Bugilovka) to the mouth of Choper on the Don.

On August 15, the Command of the II Corps received its order for the defense of the sector assigned to it, and assuming its operational responsibility from the 08:00 of the following day, the 16<sup>th</sup>, completed the deployment on the Don of the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army Forces.

From the concept of action to which the defense would be based, it emerged that this was foreseen on the heights that flank the river, rather than on the edge of the watercourse, and as the Italian Command was concerned with the creation of mobile reserves in order to deal with sudden need.

For the units discharged from railway trains in the Karkov area, the route to the Don exceeded the 1000 kilometers: 1,100 for the units and 1,200 for motorized. For units from the Stalino area, the movement of 500 kilometers was comparatively halved, but still relevant.

In general the infantry had marched on foot, covering the average daily distance of 32 kilometers, much higher than normal. Few stages had been limited to 28 kilometers,

frequent were those above 35; one, completed July 27, had reached 40 kilometers.

Throughout the long phase of movement of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, from the gathering area in the Donazine basin to the right bank of Don, the Italian reconnaissance aircraft units had consistently provided information to the Army Commands and often the units of fighters who had to intervene in defense. The deployment was advanced to the fields of Vorosilovgrad, Oblivskaja, Millerovo, Kantemirovka and Karinovskaja. At the end of August, the Eastern Front Air Force Command also moved from Stalino to Vorosilovgrad.

The definitive arrangement of the passages on Donez that would join the logistics center of Vorosilovgrad, the headquarters of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, with the deployment of the Great Unit on the Front of the Don, involved an intense activity of the departments of engineers and above all those of the bridging specialties.

Near the Luganskaja equipment Bridges, the XLI German bridging battalion, on July 23, had embarked on building a stable bridge on piles, but soon had to stop the work, leaving it just started.

On July 29, the Italian I bridging battalion took over the work, using materials recovered in the area, and on 24 August the bridge could be opened to traffic, while the pontoon bridges were possible to withdraw.

Meanwhile, also the IX battalion, after surrendering its 21<sup>st</sup> company to the I Battalion, with the other two companies (22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>), on 29 July moved to the Vorosilovgrad area.

On August 5 built a bridge no. 2, with a capacity of 14 tons, on the course of Lugan, within the town center of Vorosilovgrad, and on the same day threw on the Donez, at Veselaja Gora, a 1/R deck on boats of 13 tons. Both works were over in the day.

On 8 August, this equipment bridge, which was of lesser scope and therefore limited to traffic, was folded and replaced by another Mod. 3 deck of 110 m, of a capacity of 20 tons, even on boats, put in operates by the 41<sup>st</sup> company of the II Bridging Battalion for heavy bridges, which came to the area the previous day.

On August 9<sup>th</sup>, the 42<sup>nd</sup> company of the same battalion, threw a second bridge on 54 m stands to overcome Luganka's course.



On August 11, at Veselaja Gora, work was started on the construction of a bridge on stilts over the Donez, similar to Luganskaja, and these works were completed by September.

During the first half of August, in the Gorlovka - Novo Gorlovka (Donez Basin) area, the arrival of the first of the alpine Divisions that had been destined for them was started to the Russian front: the *Tridentina* Division (2).

On August 16, setting the necessary logistic measures for the movement, the first units started walking on Armavir, which is over 400 kilometers in line by air, at the foot of the Caucasus.

Most of the Alpine Corps would come later.

On August 19, Command of the Army Group "A" (Caucasus), with whom the Alpinists seemed to start cooperating, communicated to General Gabriele Nasci, Commander of the Army Corps, that the Great Unit placed under his orders was to return as part of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, deployed on the Don.

The criterion of unitary utilization of the Italian expeditionary force, on the Russian front, the criterion always supported by the Supreme Command, the Commander of the CSIR, as well as by the Commander of the Army, had been affirmed, in order to avoid the dismantling of Italian units several times previously attempted and which could be observed in the Romanian units.

## 2. - THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3<sup>rd</sup> CELERE DIVISION IN THE BEND OF THE SERAFIMOVIC (Drawing n. 23)

### A) FIRST PHASE (24 JULY - AUGUST 2, 1942)

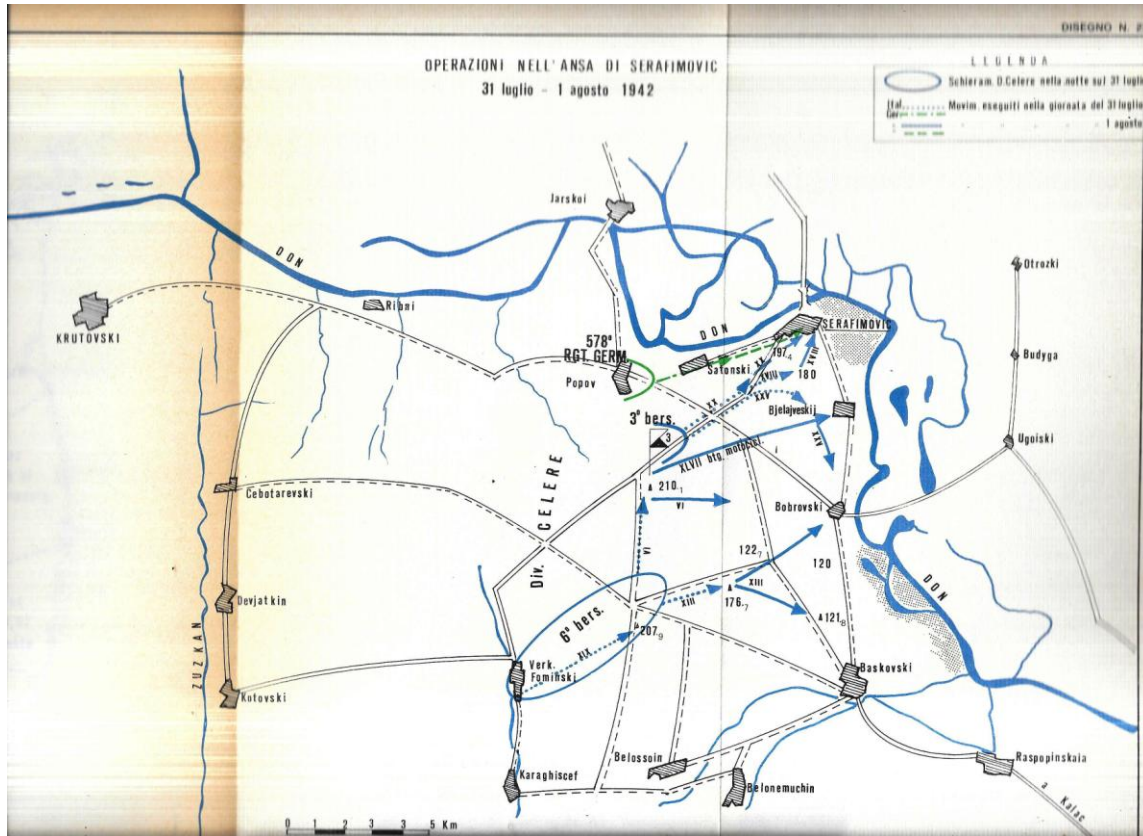
The German Army Group "B" won victoriously the Don's hurdle line, downhill along the right bank, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Army (in that group), with its XVII Army Corps, had occupied the area of Serafimovic-Kalac, where Don, describing a broad convex curve to the east, touches the easternmost point of its course.

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(2) The occurrences of arrival and use of alpine units are dealt with in Chapter XIII.

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map #23



Meanwhile, the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Armory, passed the Don to the east of Ternovskaja, aimed at Stalingrad, where the 6<sup>th</sup> Army from Kalac was also heading. This move benefited Army Group "A", which had embarked on the march towards the Caucasus region.

It was therefore necessary that the stretch of the Don river line upstream of the connecting Kalac - Stalingrad would not become the starting point for maneuvering operations with which Soviet forces could threaten the rear of the German armies operating in the south - east.

The first phase of that defensive action was to eliminate any Soviet bridgehead on the right bank of the Don.

From the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army, destined to settle on the Don to the left of the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army (whose left wing was the XVII German Army Corps) anticipating the shift of dependencies from Army Group "A" to the Group "B", the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division of the *Celere Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta*, was completely detached and, consequently, suitable to cover quickly the distance of about 400 km, existing between the zone of deployment at that time and that of intended use.

On 24 July, the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division, which the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army had taken to his direct dependencies, was still stationed in the mining basin of Mius, 50 kilometers south-south-east of Voroscilovgrad, and in that same day he received the order to go to the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army.

General Paulus held that the Italian division, with a fast march to Voroscilovgrad - Millerovo - Bokovskaja, went to eliminate the bridgehead established by the enemy on the right of Don at Serafimovic, which posed a threat to the left flank of the Army.

On the 25<sup>th</sup>, the Division moves into the suburb of the south - east of the city of Voroscilovgrad; On the 26<sup>th</sup>, between 04:10 and 13:45 hours, in articulated formation with seven march echelons (3), it travels over the pontoon bridge on the 23<sup>rd</sup> into Luganskaja, and no large Italian Units were still crossed. In the afternoon

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(3) 1<sup>st</sup>) XLVII Bersaglieri motorcycle battalion, II group of 75/27 of 120<sup>th</sup> artillery; 2<sup>nd</sup>) 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri regiment with reinforcements; 3<sup>rd</sup>) Command of the Division, company of engineer artisans and reinforcements; 4<sup>th</sup>) 120<sup>th</sup> motorized artillery regiment (less II group); 5<sup>th</sup>) 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri regiment with reinforcements; 6<sup>th</sup>) LXII artillery group of 105/32 C.A. .; 7<sup>th</sup>) Logistic unit (health section, 2 field hospitals, subsistence section, etc.).

reaches Millerovo, though it is lost in the first part of the movement from the bad state of the road.

On the 27th, with another stage of 100km over the dusty streets, the Division comes to Bokovskaja - Ponomarevka-Nizne Astakof, where it stops and receives the order of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army to move to the XVII Corps of Arms German (Commander: General Hollidt), destined to remain on the broad front of the Don.

On July 28, the units remain stationary at the Zariza Valley, while the Commander and the Deputy Commander, with the Regiment Commander, make reconnaissance in the area of their next employment.

On the evening of the same day, the Order of the XVII Army Corps (*Document No. 70*) arrives at the Division to reach the area south of Serafirnovic between Baskovski and Ribni by the following day to prepare for the attack of the bridgehead held by the Soviets and which is constantly being strengthened.

The 578<sup>th</sup> German infantry regiment, already in place, is reinforced by the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division. It monitors the enemy on a front of about 25 kilometers, with only two battalions reduced to 400 men each and with a few artillery pieces.

On the 29<sup>th</sup>, the division articulated for combat reached the Bokovskaja - Gorbatovo - Blinof - Verhnij Zarizinskaja area at 14:00 for, having the most advanced slope in Verh. Fominski and the Command at Karaghiscef.

On the same day, General Hollidt goes to the Division's Command to make the latest action agreements in person, while it turns out that in the same morning his opponent rejected the weak elements of the 578<sup>th</sup> German infantry who were in Baskovski and Bobrovski, occupying the two locations. In the afternoon a new Soviet action forces the elements of the 578<sup>th</sup>, which occupy it, to clear hill 207.9.

The Commander of the *Celere* Division goes to hill 210, where is established the 578<sup>th</sup> the Command Post, and he learns that the regiment is made up of only two battalions.

To the right it is connected, by means of patrols, with the 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, even as part of the XVII Corps, but on the left, in the direction of Ribni, there is a void of more than 30 kilometers to the units of the XXIX German Army Corps, now included in the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army. This sector at the sectoral limit is monitored along the shore of Don by only a few motorcyclists patrols.

The enemy occupies, with around 3,000 men, all the locations of the bridgehead, up to the base line of the loop, from Baskovski to Satonski (included). Two or three divisions are expected in the bridgehead to conduct offensive action south-east to unlock Soviet units encircled by other forces of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army and to ease the pressure of the Germans on Stalingrad (today Volgograd).

Thus, while the general situation appears to be unfavorable and unclear, Russian infiltrations on the right bank of Don and in the woods that flank are very frequent, also coming from the area assigned to the 79<sup>th</sup> Division.

The ground on which the operations are to be carried out does not differ significantly from the usual general aspect.

In particular: the Don, which in the stretch from Satonski to Serafimovic flows from west to east, a few kilometers to the east of this habitat, takes a general course from north to south, drawing in the same vein that Serafimovic takes its name. The course of the river has a width of 200 to 400 meters, quite deep, with low, sinuous and woody shores.

The village of Serafimovic is a large village, predominantly south of the river, with groups of houses on the northern shore.

In the east of the inhabited area a forest occupies the whole northern summit of the loop. This is delimited south by a ridge between the heights of hill 197.4 and 180, oriented from west to east, steeply to the north and terraced to the south, so as to offer good tactical hold to the south facing defense.

Between Bobrovski and Baskovski, the right bank of the Don, northwest to south - east, is covered by a thick forest, extending for about 5 kilometers along the river and deep about 3, broken by canals and swamps, dominated by west from the steps that from the hill 121.8, 176.7 and 122.7 go down to the two villages.

On the same day of July 29, the Commander of the Division orders the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment to retake hill 207.9 and occupy the heights facing Baskovski.

At dawn of the 30<sup>th</sup>, XIX/6<sup>th</sup> pushes the opponent from hill 207.9 and proceeds to hill 122.7; VI/6<sup>th</sup> goes to Baskovski, which it does not reach, but occupies hill 149.1, Bellosoin, Belonemuchin, where it replaces German units. The XIII/6<sup>th</sup> closed towards the head of the "balka" of Verh, Fominski. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment and artillery follow the movement. The Tactical Command of the Division is set on hill 210.1 to that of the 578<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Regiment.

In the knowledge that the enemy now knows the arrival of the new Great Unit, in anticipation of its reaction and the announced worsening of weather conditions, the times of the artillery and all the second-tier units are accelerated.

Towards 14:00 on the same day of the 30<sup>th</sup>, the Soviets launched a double attack: from the north in the direction of hill 210.1 with 24 tanks of the T-34 model and another from the east in the direction of hill 176.7 with 15 T-18\* tanks. The Celere of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division's are facing for the first time an action of armored vehicles, but they know how to quickly dispense their formations and turn the action of their weapons, though ineffective against the armored vehicles, on the Russian infantry that accompany the tanks. The artillery action, including two sections of the 75/39 battery recently assigned, is effective at short distances, knocking out of combat 12 of the attacking tanks.

The XIX/6<sup>th</sup> and the II/120<sup>th</sup>, which are taking position, have been invested and have suffered the most serious damage.

At the end of the fight, our losses are sensitive. The XXV/3<sup>rd</sup> reaches its own deployment zone, XIX/6<sup>th</sup> retained possession of hill 207.9, just the 2<sup>nd</sup> group of 120<sup>th</sup> artillery directly invested by the tanks suffered severe loss of 10 guns of 75/27 on 12, 2 guns of 20, 7 tractors and 13 vehicles.

On July 31, at 02:15, ahead of the other Italian forces in the Division, the 578<sup>th</sup> infantry, on the left, with surprise and flanking action, attack enemy positions at Satonski, occupy them and at 03:30 on the west slopes of hill 197.4.

At the same time, the three "Bersaglieri", with two battalions in first echelon and one in second, move to attack the eastern slopes, then push to Serafimovic. Over the first defensive system and comes into contact with the second, but the reaction the enemy is so violent that the regiment has to send its XXV battalion in front of Bjelajevski, whereby the enemy reaction appears more dangerous.

Between 10:00 and 12:00, the Soviets counterattack with tanks, but without success.

At 14:00, when, on the left, , the 578<sup>th</sup> has now entered Satonski and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri, in the center, has nearly reached hills 197.4 and 180, a new Russian counterattack, also supported by tanks, is launched against these two regiments, straddling the Serafimovic- Popov direction. The resistance of the Italians and the Germans is tenacious, but the tanks reach the position of the artillery, though

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\*T-18 is a light tank derived from the French Renault, with a 37 mm gun, 5.9 tons, 10 mph, first mass produced pre-war 1928-1931.

then is repulsed and lost almost all the infantry who followed the action of the armored vehicles.

On the right, the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri, to which was reunited with its VI battalion, replaced by German units (305<sup>th</sup> Division), surpassed the enemy resistance and reached the crest of hills 176.7 and 122.7, giving protection to the right side of the two attacking columns. Counterattacked with the support of tanks at Bobrovski, resisted and repelled the enemy, inflicting severe losses, with the III/120<sup>th</sup> artillery's aid and the 75/39 anti-tank battery.

Some tanks insinuated through the positions of artillery, while they carried out a raid on the rear, took short distances from the Division Command, being destroyed by the rapid intervention of a section of 75/39 anti-tank guns, placed in a field of sunflowers.

In the evening all counterattacks were rejected. The from the captives it was learn that the enemy began to commence between 30 and 31 July the offensive on the rear of the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army at Kalac and that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere intervention prevented him in his move and was forced to the defensive. It is also apparent that the Soviets have considerable but unspecified forces, on the left of the Don, of two divisions on the right, reinforced by a Brigade of 50 tanks, mostly T - 34, just completed at the Stalingrad factories, and fast wagons T - 18.

Late in the afternoon, in order to get a surprise effect, the Commander of the XVII Corps orders to attack the enemy in the night, keeping the same device of the previous day.

At 00:30 of 1 August the attack was resumed.

The 578<sup>th</sup> advances from Satonski along the right side of Don. The XX battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri reaches by surprise the heights of hill 180. The enemy's reaction is very strong, especially in artillery and mortar. At the first lights of dawn, the XX, backed by action by German aircraft, attacks hill 197.4, and by surmounting the resistance, the conquest, facilitating the action of the 578<sup>th</sup>, which at 05:30, enters Serafimovic from the south, while XX and XVIII come from the east.

The XXV battalion, who faced Bjelajevski, had to connect with VI/6<sup>th</sup> at Bobrovski, did not find the contact, moved to the south-east, detaching himself excessively from the other battalions of the regiment. The Division Commander fills the void with the XLVII battalion, thus engaging almost all the divisional reserve, which is reduced to only the 3<sup>rd</sup> motorcycle company. XLVII occupies Bjelajevski at 18:00.

The XIII/6<sup>th</sup>, in the meantime, with its detachment, won, after hard battles, hill 121.8 north of Baskovski and other hills opposite this village and Bobrovski. Counterattacked, it resisted on the positions it achieved.

In the evening of August 1<sup>st</sup>:

- Serafimovic and Bjelajevski are occupied, but enemy units remain in the forest east of Serafimovic;

- the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri is attested on the ridge in front of the Bobrovski and Baskovski villages.

At 02:00 on August 2, the action is resumed. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri (with battalions XVIII, XX and XLVII motorcyclists) with the sweep being complete the occupation of Serafimovic and Bjelajevski.

The Deputy Commander of the Division, by means of a first column of Bersaglieri (XIII/6<sup>th</sup>, XIX/6<sup>th</sup> and XXV/3<sup>rd</sup>) and a second (VI/6<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> motorcyclists companies) must provide for the occupation of Bobrovski and of Baskovski.

The column of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri (commanded by Colonel Caretto) sweeps the forest to the east of Serafimovici, reaches Don in the sector, rejects a strong Soviet counterattack but fails to complete the sweep.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri column: XIII/6<sup>th</sup>, XIX/6<sup>th</sup> and XXV/3<sup>rd</sup> (commanded by Colonel Salvatores) conquers Bobrovski at 03:00 and, is also counterattacked, resists and rejects the opponent.

The VI/6<sup>th</sup> Column (Lt. Col. Trevisani) attacks Baskovski, but the enemy resistance is very tenacious, supported by violent artillery fire. Only at 12:00 the town can be conquered.

In the afternoon the enemy manages to pass the Don with new forces and launches repeated and unsuccessful attacks, supported by tanks.

In the south-east of Baskovsky, the 79<sup>th</sup> German Division, which won Raspopinskaja, was contacted.

If the enemy has suffered heavy losses in men, tanks, weapons and various materials during the day, the Division has further reduced numerically. How many are still present in the units after fighting for four days and three nights. The Commander of the Division asks the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, from which he has not ceased the organic and disciplinary dependence, to be assigned massive reinforcements and given to the *Celere* a break to proceed to the reorganization of the units. The German XVII Corps Commander, for his part, promises reinforcements.



On the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Commander of the Division orders that the following day:

- (a) there are two sectors:
  - "Lombardi", from Serafimovic to Bjelajevski (included), with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri (less XXV battalion), XLVII motorcyclists and other reinforcing elements;
  - "Salvatores", from Bjelajevski (excluding) to Baskovski (included), with the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri (less the VI battalion) and reinforcement elements;
  - divisional reserve: VI and XXV battalion, east of hill 210.1;
- (b) they are to push on the banks of the Don surveillance elements, which the bulk, kept on the positions reached, must be able to be reinforce promptly;
- (c) are to be completed, the fieldworks of the two sectors, east of Serafimovic and the Bobrovski and Baskovski woods.

In the morning of 3 August, the XVIII/3<sup>rd</sup>, a German infantry battalion and the 3<sup>rd</sup> motorcyclists company, overcoming series of resistance from enemy units, for more then driven back over Don, sweep the forest east of Serafimovic.

In the sector of the 6<sup>th</sup>, the enemy, who in the night crossed the river with his other reinforcements, at 03:00 with the first lights, takes the initiative by attacking Bobrovski. After a long battle, the XIII Bersaglieri must fall back on the ridge that is dominating the country from the east. It moves to counterattack with the VI/6<sup>th</sup> and, after a fight lasting eleven hours and after hand to hand fighting, Bobrovski is regained. Losses are serious on both sides.

Even Baskovski, temporarily abandoned, after a hard struggle, is recaptured.

At 14.30, the situation can be re-established in the eastern sector of the Division, but the forest between the two villages remains in enemy hands.

The captives taken signal the arrival of new and remarkable forces in support of their side.

With these five days of tiring struggle, the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division concludes a phase of the battle, reaching the goal of eliminating the threatening bridgehead south of Don, to put off to superior forces, who have contended for possession.

The bridgehead, of great importance to the opponent, naturally strong for the existence of south-facing hills and villages reduced to strongpoints, had been provided with solid and complex field works, especially at the top of the loop, on hills 197.4 and 180, conquered by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri. The 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri (with the XX/3<sup>rd</sup> contest and the 3<sup>rd</sup> motorcycle company) had conquered and defended Bobrovski. The XLVII motorcycle battalion was distinguished in the taking of Bjajajevski.

The enemy had suffered heavy losses in men and vehicles: of the 50 tanks of the Armored Brigade, 47 and 2 armored cars had been eliminated: 35 destroyed, mostly by artillery, some by the Bersaglieri with gas bottles; 12 had been forced to submerge in Don (of that total: 31 tanks and 2 armored cars had been destroyed by Italian units and 16 by German units).

In a first round-up of the battlefield, documents and sketches on the corpses of Soviet officers were found confirming the enemy's intent to amass forces in the bridgehead to move on the Bobrovski-Baskovski area as the starting point for a direct attack south, on Kalac (*Document No. 71*).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere's* intervention resulted in the reversal of the situation, forcing the opponent, ready to attack, to defend and amass forces to keep the loop.

Concordance statements of prisoners, confirmed by surveys of aerial reconnaissance, signaled the turnout of 5 divisions to attempt to regain the bridgehead, whose possession was necessary for the south passage of Don, prior to any action against the German rear areas. The cessation, at least temporarily, of the purpose of that project was the positive result of the operation carried out by the *Celere* Division.

This five-day phase of the battle caused the loss of about 1,000 Italian fighters (fallen, wounded, missing), while the magnitude of the losses suffered by the German units was not known.

## B) SECOND PHASE (AUGUST 3 - 21, 1942)

At the end of the battle on the day of August 3, the Commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division, sure to have completed the task he had received, expressed to the Commander of the XVII German Army Corps

the view that the material of employment of the whole forest between Bobrovski and Baskovski was not needed in the heights of hill 176.7 and hill 121.8 since, having gained the solid possession of the two villages, consequently there would be also access to the woods. The minute sweep of this, intersected by canals and swamps, would have required the deployment of numerous forces, while Italian and German fighters under the Division's orders were very tired and reduced in numbers as a result of the recent losses.

General Hollidt, Commander of the XVII Corps, however, ordered on the 4<sup>th</sup> that the wood was also sweep and that on the 5<sup>th</sup> the Italian occupation was carried beyond it until the right bank of Don was materially reached.

In addition, worried about the existence of a large space not occupied by the deployment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* and the German XX Corps, the same general ordered that on the same day of 5 August the XXV Bersaglieri battalions (3<sup>rd</sup> regiment), reinforced by the 100/17 of the I group of 120<sup>th</sup> artillery, 81 mortars and 47/32 A/T guns, moved to Cebotarevski to oversee a branch of Don's right bank, 30 kilometers wide.

From the execution of this order the forces available to the Division would be further reduced.

Deprived of the forces destined to swept the forest, for the surveillance of the front between Satonski and Bobrovski (about 20 kilometers), left only the XVIII/3rd and the XX/3, the two German battalions of 578<sup>th</sup> Regt. and the XLVII motorcyclists, all with few efficient riders after the battle of the previous days.

In order to fulfill the orders received, the Command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* has the "Schuchard column" (from the name of the German Major, the commander of a regiment, given by the Command directly from the XVII Corps) on August 5, constituted by Bersaglieri battalions XIII/6<sup>th</sup> and XIX/6<sup>th</sup>, by the German infantry battalions I/208<sup>th</sup> and III/212<sup>th</sup> (79<sup>th</sup> Division), the III Group of the artillery 120<sup>th</sup> and the remains of the II (75/27 cannons), LXII group cannons 105/32, carry out the sweep of the forest, supported by a double intervention of Stukas.

The reaction of the enemy grows violent, causing many losses from both sides, but in the evening the right bank of Don was reached.

Meanwhile, the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Battalion (6<sup>th</sup> regiment), still reinforced by the 3<sup>rd</sup> motorcycle company, has maintained the occupation of hills 176.7 and 121.8.

On that same day, the Commander of the 79th German Division, accompanied by the Commander of the Artillery of the same Division, met at the observatory of hill 176.7 the commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment (Col. Umberto Salvatores), he declared to him, "You Bersaglieri are marvelous. Without proper means, you stopped the Soviet tanks. Under your circumstances, we Germans could not even fight a day of war."

On the night of August 6, the enemy, quietly praising the Don, and getting the perfect knowledge of the places, infiltrates again into the wood for canals and swamps, succeeding in attacking the Italian and German units on the flanks and on the rear.

The four battalions, necessarily split into the wooded and marshy area, are forced to return to the starting positions on August 4th.

But General Hollidt, not yet convinced of the impossibility of keeping control of that land with tired and decimated forces, orders that on the same day of 6<sup>th</sup> the forest be regained. The units moved at 16:30 and at 19:00, regained what had been lost, they came back to Don's right bank.

In the other sectors of the Division, on the days of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, reinforcement work continued, while the movement of the detachment of the XX Bersaglieri Battalion reinforced in Cebotarevski was suspended.

In a similar situation, General Marazzani represents to the Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army that:

- from July 12, the Division departs and fights without stops;
- from that day to the 5<sup>th</sup> of August the losses amounted to 1,550 men;
- As of July 30 (beginning of the battle) on 6 August, the Division lost more than one third of its staff: some battalions are now reduced to about 200 men;
- in eight days the units did not have a minute rest;
- the units are exhausted and not a few fighters are fainted by the great tiredness.

Therefore it would be necessary and urgent to give up the sector of Cebotarevski by battalions drawn from the *Celere* Division, replacing them with the same number, less worn, the Pasubio Division, as the least distant from the *Celere*, so that the reduced forces of the latter can not be subtracted from sector of Serafimovic. But the proposal does not get a positive result.

Even on the night of August 7, the enemy repeats in the woods the action of the previous night, and throughout the day of the 7<sup>th</sup>, violent and fractional clashes take place in that sector. In the evening the enemy is almost completely rejected beyond the river.

The XIII battalion of the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri, more worn out than the others, was intended to replace the XX/3<sup>rd</sup>, going to his place to Cebotarevski instead, where it would find itself in a less difficult situation.

The II battalion of the 212<sup>th</sup> German infantry, which arrives the 7<sup>th</sup> at Verk Fominski, is also available for the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere*.

On the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup>, General Marazzani, referring in summary to the Army Command on operations of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, insists on the abandonment of the units of the *Celere* Division, pointing out that about 6,000 men in the fire line lost 1,082 (18%), including 58 officers, in addition to the losses of the German units, proportionately no less serious. This message intersects with another praise for everyone, addressed to the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* by the Commander of the Army.

For a third time, on August 8, despite the heavy losses suffered on the previous day, the Soviets infiltrate the woods, attack at dawn, and causing the occupying Italian and German units once again retreat to the heights.

Finally, General Hollidt has come to the conclusion that it is not possible to maintain the occupation of the woods "given the enormous tiredness of the troops," he writes, and orders to resist to the bitter end on the dominant reliefs.

But the Division has exhausted every reserve. Even the II/212<sup>th</sup> German had to come in line.

On the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup>, after powerful fire preparation, the enemy attacks the Germans in defense of the Satoni sector, forcing them to withdraw.

The Division's Command, left unchecked, launches an Italian company formation, consisting of engineers and another German, and is also made-up. The zeal of the engineers, not less than the bersaglieri, validly supported by the artillery, obtains the preservation of the ridge dominating Satonski.

In the afternoon of the 8<sup>th</sup>, the XVII Corps commander removes from the wrecked mass of *Celere* also the XXV battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri, to transfer it to the Cebotarevski area, where it is necessary to join the XIII/6<sup>th</sup> and 120<sup>th</sup> artillery. The entire detachment is placed at the orders of Colonel Felici, commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri regiment (4)

Furthermore, the *Celeste* Division (with the XVIII and XX/3<sup>rd</sup>, VI/6<sup>th</sup>, XLVII motorcyclists and I/208<sup>th</sup> German with artillery) is destined to defend the north - eastern corner of the loop from Satonski to Bobrovski (included).

From Bobrovski (excluding) to the south, must take the place of the 79<sup>th</sup> German pioneering division, under whose orders the XIX/6<sup>th</sup> passes.

The XX Bersaglieri battalion, replaced by an infantry battalion of the 79<sup>th</sup> Division, moves into divisional reserve in Verh. Fominski.

But on the same evening of the 8<sup>th</sup>, when the situation appears normalized, with the bend in *Celere*'s possession, except the Bobrovski and Baskovski woods, the orders were again changed by the Command of the XVII German Corps.

The same commander of the *Celere* Division is set to replace Colonel Felici in the Command of Forces sent to Cebotarevski, while the remaining two-thirds of the Division, placed under the orders of the Deputy Commander, passed to the 79<sup>th</sup> German Division.

General Marazzani strongly refuses to comply with these prescriptions, as he intends to retain the Command of the bulk of his Division.

On the morning of August 9, General Hollidt, who went to the Command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere*, acknowledges that he had given an order that can not be executed, annulled it and apologized.

Therefore, in view of the availability of the forces and the subsequent replacement of *Celere* with the 79<sup>th</sup> German Division, the *Celere* is the sector of Cebotarevski, with the units under Colonel Felici, and another non-contiguous sector, by Serafimovic (excluded) to hill 120 of Bobrovski. (including), with the remaining units of the Division (4 Bersaglieri battalions, 1 German, 2 artillery groups and minor units). A column of the 79<sup>th</sup> Division is entrusted to maintain the link between the two sectors.

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(4) Colonel Aminto Caretto, injured on August 2, had to leave the Command of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. He had died on the 5<sup>th</sup> for gastric gangrene caused by the wound.

On the day of August 9, the enemy attacks Raspopinskaja 79<sup>th</sup> Division (on the right of the *Celere*), also in the likely attempt to lighten the German pressure on Kalac.

The Commander of the Corps, in the opinion that the action is resumed the following day orders:

- to the 22<sup>nd</sup> German Armored Division to regain the plateau of Raspopinskaja and to rush the Baskovski forest;
- to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division to resist altogether in occupied positions and to transfer to Karaghiscef the XIX/6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri, as a reserve of the Corps.

But on August 10, the Soviets simply attack Satonski from Serafimovic, promptly rejected by the Bersaglieri and the Engineers. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division does not intervene.

It says, among other things, in the War Diary (Kriegstagebuch) of the German Supreme Command (OKW) at August 1, 1942: "On the right side of the *Celere* Division, "for the intervention of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division, the Don front is restored. The enemy here retired". The mistake comes, it seems, to have been held that the order issued on August 9 by the XVII Corps commander was executed or not revoked.

The day of 11 August passes without any particular events happening.

On 12 August the enemy attacked Bobrovski and the 13<sup>th</sup> in the forest east of Serafimovic, promptly rejected once and for all.

On 13<sup>th</sup>, the *Celere* Division Commander received the order to give up the sector's responsibility to the 79<sup>th</sup> German Division, while simultaneously ceasing operational dependence from XVII Corps.

On that same day, the Commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, General Paulus, expressed to the XVII Corps and the Italian forces with it that they cooperated thanks for what they had done in the "battle of the pocket of Kalac" (Serafimovic's bend).

In turn, General Hollidt, greeting the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division on leaving XVII Corps, thanked it, summarized its actions of war, recognized its merits in the long struggle (*Document No. 72*).

The section of the *Celere*'s sector, which was not ceded to the 79<sup>th</sup> German Division, was at the same time given to the *Sforzesca* Division, who had reached the Don. This Division, the right wing of the entire Army, went into an unresolved tactical situation destined to cause new difficult circumstances.

He would remain in place at the request of the Command of the Army Group "B" and with the consent of the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, the Lombardi Group (2 battalions of Bersaglieri, 2 artillery groups and elements of the Services) (5), under the orders of the Deputy Commander of the Division, continuing the previous addition.

The forces made available on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> moved to the Tarnoskaja - Diogtevo area (80 km north of Millerovo) to carry out a period of reorganization and rest.

The *Celere* Commander speaks to the Command of the 8th Army, from which he also relied on the employment, the opportunity to extend the withdrawal to units remaining in the 79th Division, proposing their possible replacement with other Italian units. The defensive needs of the recent Don line do not allow the acceptance of the proposal and the units of the Lombardi regimental group must remain in the Serafimovic area until August 21, when they will be able to meet with the bulk of the Division in order to continue fighting with it.

The report of the Head of the Health Service of the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment (*Document No. 73*) describes the physical situation of the *Celere's* combats, drawing on the causes of it, and technically validating the demands of the Commander of the Division.

The voids determined in the units of the latest losses added to those just left by the fallen and wounded in the operations of the Mius-Krasnyj Luch mining basin, from absenteeism to exhaustion and disease. The present force of the various battalions did not exceed 300-400 men each, VI/6<sup>th</sup> deployed only 150 Bersaglieri.

The losses suffered by the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division during the fights held in Serafimovic's bend from 30 July to 14 August were considerable: 162 dead (11 Officers), 950 injured (42 officers), 89 missing, 11 artillery pieces and other heavy material and light weapons had been destroyed.

For all these reasons, the division's operational efficiency was greatly reduced and the Great Unit needed a period of reorganization and completely personnel.

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(5) Composed of: XVIII Bersaglieri battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, XLVII Bersaglieri motorcyclists battalion, 75/27 group of the 120<sup>th</sup> artillery, LXII group of 105/32 of the 30<sup>th</sup> artillery regimental grouping, unit of the 73rd section of health care, 46<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> field hospital, 20<sup>th</sup> surgical unit, unit of the 93<sup>rd</sup> subsistence section.



If the bulk of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere*, moving to the reserve of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army could hope for a well-deserved rest, and enjoy it for at least a few days, the Lombardi group remained in the 79<sup>th</sup> German Division, having all the units deployed on the fire line, daily engaged in action by the enemy, always active and aggressive.

The Army Command continued to have the urgent need to give rest to those fighters who were not only in bad physical condition, but were also in a precarious tactical situation.

The Command of the 79<sup>th</sup> Division, on August 16<sup>th</sup>, expressed the intention to breakup the Lombardi regimental group, passing the two battalions to the sector's dependencies and taking on their own two artillery groups, a operation that General Marazzani made clear that he could not accept on the permission of the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army. This, at the request of the Army Group "B", allowed it on the 17<sup>th</sup>, authorizing the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army to retain those forces for some time.

The Lombardi group was dissolved, its units went to the direct employees of the German Division, but General Lombardi remained close to his men by sharing their fate.

On August 19, the XVIII/3<sup>rd</sup> passed into the second echelon, but already the 20<sup>th</sup> was back in line, to support the XLVII motorcyclist, violently attacked.

On 21 August all the units that had formed the Lombardi group moved, in the rain, from the sector of the 79<sup>th</sup> German Division to the adjacent sector of the *Sforzesca* Division, to return to fight other enemy forces, which attacked starting the defensive battle of the Don.

The results obtained by the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division in the Serafimovic sector had not failed.

That bridgehead, maintained by the Soviets in an attempt to counteract in the rear of the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army at Stalingrad, had been eliminated.

Attempts to reconstitute it had been thwarted.

The armament of an entire adversary armored brigade had been destroyed.

They had also inflicted on the enemy bloody losses in men, dead and injured, and the capture of 1,600 prisoners.

Other weapons and materials of all kinds had been captured or destroyed in combat.

The XVII Corps, which could not receive assistance from the remaining part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, launched in many other tests, had been validly supported by the intervention of 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* and, while it returned to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, in the section of Don's right bank adjoining the line of contact between the two Armies, the XVII Corps noted a tactic situation undoubtedly better than the one on July 29<sup>th</sup>.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE FIRST DEFENSIVE BATTLE OF THE DON (AUGUST 20 - SEPTEMBER 1, 1942)

The "First defensive battle of the Don" includes the operations carried out in the second half of August 1942 by the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army to oppose the direct offensive against it by the 63<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Army, in conjunction with the action of the 21<sup>st</sup> Soviet Army against the XVII German Army Corps (6<sup>th</sup> Army), the Great Units on the right flank of the Italian Army.

The Soviet Great Units acted in the broader framework referred to by Russian military historians as the "Volga Battle".

The two titles can not coincide, as:

- the Italian side would appear inconsistent with reality not to mention the defensive task assigned to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and to indicate clearly the places where the battles took place;

- The Soviet side, on the other hand, was the main aim of the struggle to prevent the Germans from reaching the Volga at Stalingrad (now Volgograd), so that it would not be interrupted by navigation on the river's waterway and in maintaining the possession of the city not only for its emblematic name, but above all to preserve the availability of large industrial facilities in that area.

In accordance with this essential task, the Soviet Armed Forces, with their offensive actions, were intended:

- to obtain a penetration such as to abolish the Germanic force operating on Stalingrad (6<sup>th</sup> German Army) from the bases placed to the west of Don;

- to take the greatest possible amount of Germanic and allied forces out of Stalingrad's effort, or at least to engage them where they were, to prevent them from moving elsewhere.

Don's first defensive battle was primarily fought by units of the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR (*Sjorzesca* and *Pasubio* Divisions), whose deployment is indicated in *Drawing no. 24*.

## 1. - THE TERRAIN

The area in which the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army was on the right bank of the Don stretched from the kolkoz Bugilovka (right on the right bank, about eight kilometers south of Pavlovsk) to the height of the confluence of the Choper (left tributary).

The amplitude of the sector measured 180 km by air, which, following the sinuous course of the river, became about 270.

The natural element of greater importance in that vast territory was the course of the Don.

It appeared with a first stretch of approximately 65 kilometers long, almost straight line to Novaja Kalitva, where it received from the right the confluence of the Tciornaja Kalitva.

Here, the course of the river formed an angle of nearly ninety degrees and, bending equatorially from west to east, proceeded in a straight line for about thirty kilometers. He then designed the desired characteristic of the bend at its vertex, on the left bank of Verhnij Mamon, The bend measured at the base 5 kilometers and a half loop and 10 kilometers of pocket from the base to the summit. On the valley of Ossetrovka, at the north - eastern end of the bend, Don took a general course from northwest to southeast for ninety miles to Krasnojarski.

He received from the right as a tributary also the Boguciar, on which he described some bends, among which was characteristic of the one between Krasnohorovka and Ogalev, designated by the Italian Commands as "the hat of Frigio". This lesser extent measured six kilometers of bend and as many sack.

Instead, downstream of Tihaja's confluence, the general course of Don returned to be equatorial, from west to east, though still crawling in elbows and hoards for over seventy miles to the mouth of Choper.

The width of the water surface, in the considered section, varied from 100 to 400 meters and in some places it could have waved in the summer season.

The floods, above all the melting, caused overflows that left the banks of the river, covered with reeds, especially on the left bank, where the shore was lower.

In the section considered, there was only the island of Deresovka, just upstream of the verge of Verhnij Mamon. In the summer season of lean flow, more or less thick sand banks were formed.

The tributaries - the right bank - Tciornaja Kalitva, Boguciar, Tihaja - had a modest rate compared to the Don's. Their foci were marked by wetlands.

In addition, in the southern part of the Don, at the eastern edge of the Army area, there was the Zuzkan stream, tributary of the Tcir, which in turn converged more downstream in Don, with a general northwest course south - east, in the rear of the Army.

Plastic nature of the soil was the usual environment in southern Russia, with ripples between 250 and 50 meters above sea level.

The course of the river was flanked by a series of hills, from where the loop of Verhnij Mamon, which reached the height of 220 meters, was detached from the north.

From the summit of those hills, the water surface was sometimes unseen, because during the summer the lean current was inconspicuous with respect to the banks.

In the bastion of the reliefs existing in the section considered and dominating the river, on its right bank, there were two main flat interruptions at the confluences of Tciornaja Kalitva and Boguciar. These plains were largely constituted by the marshes corresponding to the mouths of the two rivers.

The Tciornaja Kalitva plain was rapidly shrinking to the west, in the hills that surrounded it from the north and south, and therefore had little tactical relevance.

The Boguciar plain, also with a swamp at the mouth of the river at Saliman, developed in a dry land to the west of the swampy area and remained, throughout its course, a large corridor with outlet to Kantemirovka, where crossed the line railway and the road leading north to Rossosc and Svoboda and to the south towards Millerovo and Kamensk, on the course of Donez. The tactical access route of the Boguciar valley was located, not so much in the river mouth, marsh as was said, but in the veil of Verhnij Mamon, whereupon, coming down to Tvjerdoklebovka, it entered precisely in the corridor of Boguciar.

The outskirts of Tihaja in the Don did not cause significant breaks between the hills of the right bank.

The left bank was flat and low. In the background, at a distance of a few kilometers from the river, the land was rising in a step dominant hilly plains.

The right bank of Don, made up mainly of limestone - chalky soil, was well suited to field fortification works and, in general, dominated on the left bank. Where they drifted into the more or less important waters of Don, the shore dropped to the river level, losing the anti-tank barrier characteristic, owned for a distance of about 140 miles downstream; dirt works would have to be done to accentuate the steepness; in the last fifty miles upstream of the Choper confluence, the shore had no obstacle.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command had derived, from a study conducted by the German Military Geological Service, a "Geological Map on the Right Bank of the Don", to scale 1:300,000, to give the affected Commands the characteristics of the land and to direct them to the fields works to be carried out in them (*Drawing No 25*).

The shore of the right bank was represented by scarce and very small forests in the northern section of the sector, up to the village of Svinjuka, on the eastern stretch of Verhnij Mamon. Here, up to the mouth of Boguciar, the wood was almost uninterrupted on the two shores; then, to the right edge of the sector, the river bank was almost always uncovered. In the depths there were some forests, but they were of limited magnitude, consisting mainly of oaks, which offered excellent coverage in summer and discreet even in the winter.

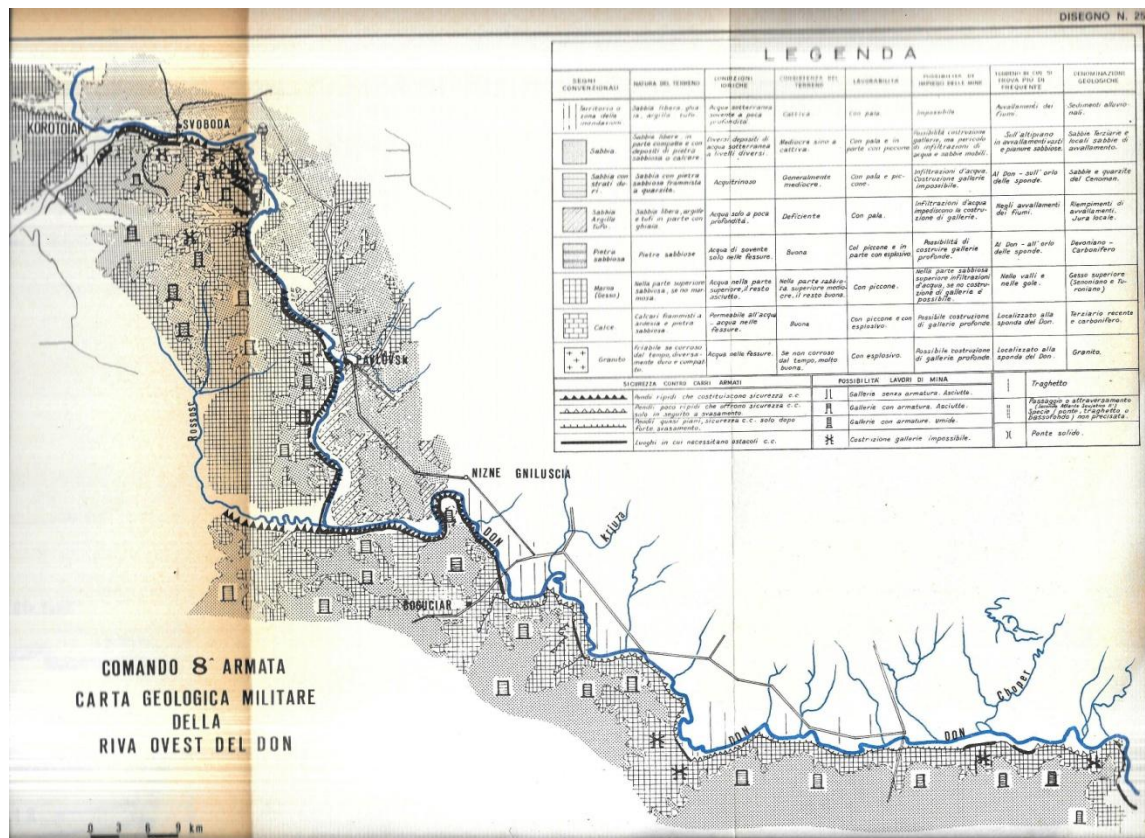
Much more dense was the cover of the left bank, for the almost continuous forest, interrupted solely by the dwellings and by a few other stretches of flat plain.

Some resources for coverage, in the band in contact with the enemy, were also offered by heaps of wheat harvested, accumulated and abandoned in place for the upcoming war operations.

Don's right-bank dwellings were all of a small size: fishermen and peasant villages, made up of "isbe", good for weather protection, but of limited utility to a defensive organization, being constructed of lumber, without cellars and always covered with thatched roofs, therefore subject to the fire hazard generated by the enemy's fire actions.

In the rear of the sector and in the depths, behind the positions of the Divisions, there was a second series of major

## Map No 25



importance, sometimes with almost urban characteristics: Rossosc, Kantemirovka, Bielovodsk, Millerovo and almost at the mouth of Boguciar on the Don, the almost destroyed town of Boguciar. Those centers were equipped with some masonry buildings, essentially desecrated churches and schools.

On the left bank of the Don, or in the immediate vicinity, the most important inhabited places to Italy were Russkoje Buivolovo, Kasinka, Olikovatka, Gorohovka, Verhnij Mamon (Mamon Superiore), Nizne Gniluscia, Nizne Mamon (Mamon Inferiore), Bitscek and Vescenskaja .

The main axes of ordinary communications, all dirt topped, were:

- the road to the rear of the front line Jevdakovo - Podgornoe - Rossosc - Kantemirovka - Tercovo - Millerovo;
- the radials to the occupied positions on the Don:
  - Boguciar valley, used promiscuously by the German II and XXIX Army Corps;
  - Millerovo - Diogtevo - Mescov, used by the XXIX Army Corps;
  - Millerovo - Nizne Astakof - Bokovskaja, used by the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR;
- the back roads:
  - Rossosc - Rovenki - Aidàr valley - Starobelsk - bridge of Veselaja Cora - Voroscilovgrad;
  - Kantemirovka - Bielovodsk - Olkovaja - bridge of Luganskaja - Voroscilovgrad;
  - Millerovo - Olkovaja - bridge of Luganskaja - Voroscilovgrad.

To this main network, maintained in part by the artisans of the Italian engineers and partially by the German Todt Organization, the secondary road network was connected to individual units, large and small, deployed in the various defensive sectors. The units had to provide, in their own right, to maintenance and, at times, to the opening of the streets, employing the directly dependent units.

Off-road running was not difficult in that area and, consequently, the immediate reversals of the resistance position could easily be reached by the trucks.

In the meantime, when the track gauge was reduced, rail service was resumed on the line



parallel to the evolution of the front Jevdakovo - Rossosc - Kanternirovka - Millerovo - Staraja Staniza, first linked to the rest of the net by transshipment to extremes, then eliminated by the work of the Italian railway engineers (1).

## 2. - THE SITUATION

The 8th Army was part of the German Army Group "B" and had:

- on the left the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army (VII Army Corps - 23<sup>rd</sup> Division);
- to the right the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army (XVII Army Corps – 79<sup>th</sup> Division).

The Army commanded the front to be defended in three areas by Army Corps, namely, from left to right (*Drawing No 26*):

- II Corps, with:

- 294<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Division, 65 km, from the Bugilovka kolkoz to the river Tciornaja Kalitva;
- *Cosseria* Division, 34 km, from Tciornaja Kalitva to the western margin of the Verhnij Mamon loop;
- *Ravenna* Division, 30 km, from the western margin of the Verhnij Mamon loop at the mouth of the Boguciar;

- XXIX German Corps, with:

- Torino Division, 35 km, from the mouth of Boguciar to the village of Suchoj Donez;
- 62<sup>nd</sup> Division of German infantry, 55 km, from Suchoj Donez to the village of Merkulov;

- XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, with:

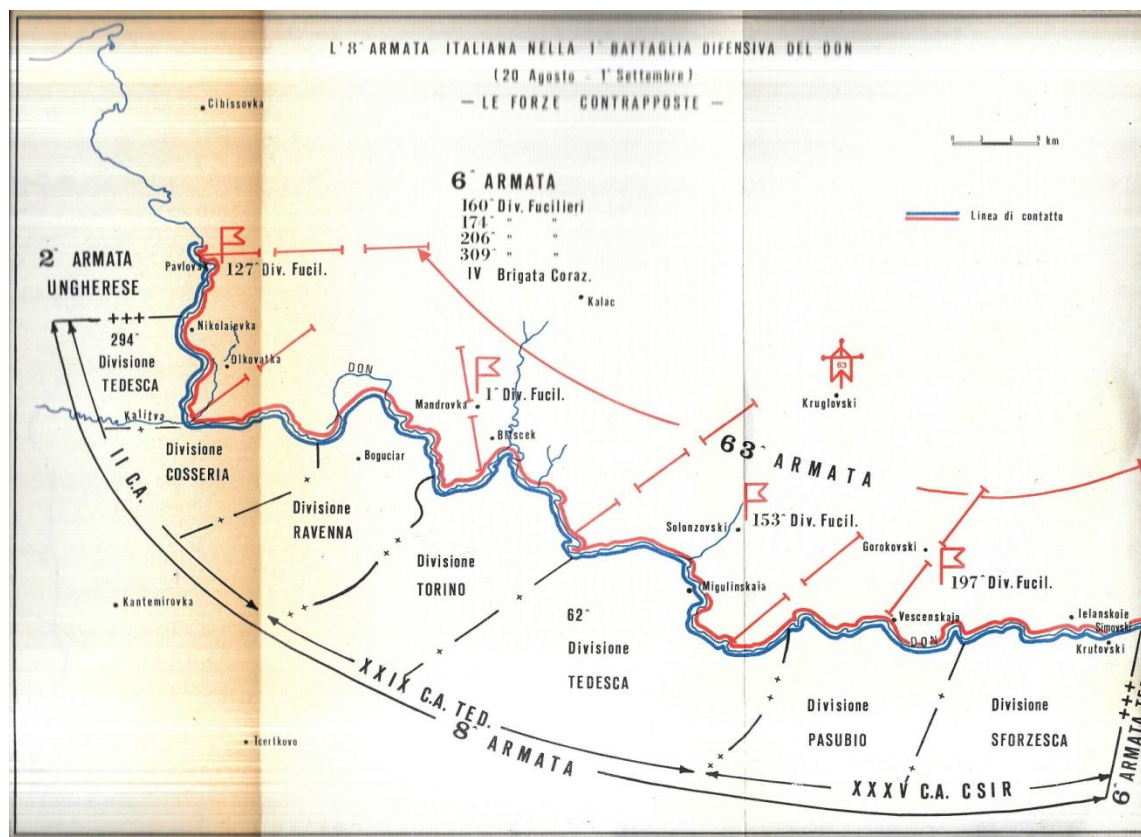
- *Pasubio* Division, 30 km, from Merkulov to the village of Rubescinski;
- *Sforzesca* Division, 33 km, from Rubescinski at the mouth of the Choper.

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(1) See publication "I Servizi logistici delle Unità italiane al fronte russo (1941 - 1943)" of the MAGGIORE ESERCITO STATE - HISTORICAL OFFICE, Rome, 1975.

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map No 26



As soon as the Army Command received news of Don's employment, when it still felt that it had available nine divisions, instead of eight, to be deployed on the front line, on July 31, he was present at the Command of the Army Group "B" excessive amplitude of the divisional sectors.

Excluded of the 294<sup>th</sup> German Division (II Army Corps), which had been assigned a course of naturally strong front, due to the obstacle characteristics represented by Don, the remaining part of the deployment of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was that the divisions were entrusted with the defense of areas of an average of 34 kilometers, with apparent disproportion between the faces and forces available and in contrast to doctrine. Also by allocating to the line all the six infantry battalions of each Division, each would be entrusted with the task of defending it almost six kilometers, while the Commander of the Division would be left with no reserve of availability of forces to run in support of a threatened point.

The creation of a single divisional reserve was difficult because the breadth of the sectors made it too slow to intervene.

The allocation of the reserve in two blocks improved the solution to the problem of the intervention times, but it complicated that of the forces to be allocated to the line.

In general, four battalions were deployed in the first echelon and two in second, but in some cases the latter had to surrender a company as a battalion unit that, having had to deploy the three advanced rifle companies, immediate intervention in support of points that may be threatened.

Each of the four battalions assigned to the first echelon was entrusted with the defense of a broad field of about seven kilometers. The advanced companies would have had to be large, chained along their fronts and not deeply staggered.

The fire action of all the weapons inevitably had to gravitate on the front to form a curtain of the greatest possible consistency, but which was, by contrast, discontinuous because of the intervals between the strongpoints.

The active anti-tank defense, though focused on the most probable breakthroughs points of enemy armored vehicles, was conditioned by the vastness of the front. There was therefore a need for greater emphasis on the passive obstacle where it could be realized, or

with mined fields, that the low density of automatic defense weapons was, however, able to beat very limited.

The effectiveness of the action of artillery was, of course, of the general situation described above.

The groups assigned to the regimental sectors, in order to be able to intervene on all their fronts, had to take on advanced deployments that exposed them to the events of the infantry struggle.

The artillery, the divisional mass of maneuver, could not act centrally in the hands of the Commander, as it did not have the cannons capable of covering the whole front of the Division.

The Army Corps, having no second-line divisions, saw their ability to maneuver to the four battalions of the Militia reinforced by their accompanying weapons limited, but could not intervene with artillery fire, as even the cannons with long range fire (149/40) did not have enough reach to act on the front of the whole sector.

The Armed Corps Artillery Command had to decentralize all the artillery directly to the Army Corps, limiting themselves to exercising on them and those of the other Great Units an inspection action.

The only force of maneuver available to the Commander of the Army remained the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division of the *Celere*, which in the general framework found a possibility of good use, especially after its total motorization that had made it a homogeneous instrument. But the sudden call in the area of the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army, the hard fights in the Serafirnovic loop and the Mius basin, had greatly reduced its operational efficiency. Moreover, as the Army assumed the responsibility of the sector, the Division was not only required to reorganize itself, but it was with infantry units reduced by 1/3 and halving of artillery units, as two battalions of Bersaglieri and two artillery groups had remained with the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, in the 79<sup>th</sup> Division.

The commanders of the Italian Great Units tried to give the strength of their sector the least depth compatible with the forces available, gravitating with them on the heights, rather than on the surface of the water. This choice was rational even for the need to put the arrangement of the field works safe from the flood of the river, inevitable mainly after the autumn rains

In two parts of the vast sector of the Army, the course of the Don could not have been reached: in the loop of Verhnij Mamon and in the loop of Krasnohorovka-Ogalev (the "cap of frigio").

In Verhnij Mamon's loop, the Soviets remained in the northern edge of it, climbing up to the slopes of hill 220. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> August, the 294<sup>th</sup> German Division had taken an offensive action to seize it and then handed it over to the *Ravenna* Division.

The Command of the II Corps, in its defense order, did not mention hill 220, leaving the Command of the *Ravenna* Division free to specify whether it intended to retain possession. General Edoardo Nebbia, Commander of the Division, immediately pointed out that abandoning the height would have given the enemy the possibility of observing within the Italian lines while the artillery deployment would have to be backward, losing the possibility of beating Ossetrovka and the corresponding ferry. Therefore the enemy could easily gather to spread possible attacks from north to south. Even the moral indifference to not yield as much as the ally had conquered a few days ago led to the retention of possession.

The Commander of the Army, though not ignoring that the position would remain almost insulated, not having protective barriers, and would require a lot of forces to be defended, which if it was placed at the top would not have been able to make system with the lateral sections of the line and it would easily be diverted from the east and northeast, adhered to the considerations set forth by the *Ravenna* Command and decided to include hill 220 in the resistance position.

Krasnohorovka - Ogalev's loop did not have similar considerations. Its limited amplitude and its altimeter configuration made it subject to the Floods of Don and the Commander of the *Torino* Division easily understood with the commander of the XXIX German Corps, in order to permanently occupy only a dominant number of strong points, placing an observation post connected by telephone, with the only function of giving timely alarm. The rest of the loop had to be watched by patrols.

Finally, at the extreme right wing of the Army, at the sectoral limit with the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, at the mouth of the Choper, there was an unclear situation and, in any case, a cause for concern.

In the area of the 79<sup>th</sup> Division (XVII Army Corps), as far as the German Major Unit and the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division had bloody operated, the enemy forces had easy access and sometimes stayed there. This situation had not been solved so much that the XVII Corps had not yet released the units constituting the Lombardi grouping (2), after that the *Celere* Division was replaced by *Sforzesca* in the section of the area adjacent to the villages of Simovski Sforzesca) and Bobrovski (pasted to the 79), both on the shore of Don, and the head of the Zuzkan stream, defining from north to south.

There was an uninterrupted space of 11 kilometers to the east of Simovski, up to Isbuscenski, where Knobloch Tactical Reconnaissance (1 Cavalry Squadron, 1 Squadron of Cyclists, Pioneer Company, Reinforced by anti-tank Arms) was deployed in Barrier posts are somewhat rearward and largely interlinked.

The Russians, who occupied almost the entire area of Don's right bank dwelling in the sector of the 79<sup>th</sup> German Division, expanded their occupation deeply, having a good starting point to conduct offensive operations against the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR and particularly against the *Sforzesca*. Having said that, the Commander of the Division had informed the Superior Commander, who in turn had immediately made his German liaison officer aware of the reports in his possession.

The XXXV Army Corps, however, had not neglected to take action and ordered a battalion (I/54<sup>th</sup>) for the defense of his right flank under the Command of the *Sforzesca*, in the defense of the sector. The front on which was I/54<sup>th</sup> had a width of 15 kilometers (from Simovski to Devjatkin).

To extend south to the defensive side, he had entrusted another area of 10 miles, from Deviatkin to Bolschoi, to the 3 *Gennaio* militia grouping, ordering him to settle for defense on the right bank of the Zuzkan stream.

Further south, the Cavalry grouping, moving from the area between Bolschoi and Pronin, should have employed the *Savoia Cavalleria* regiment, the II Horse artillery group and an anti-tank company (Bettoni column) to carry out wide-range explorations

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(2) See chapter XI.

in the northeast direction, until it connects with elements of the 79<sup>th</sup> German Division.

In order to ensure a better defense of the Don line, it would have been necessary to have as soon as possible a large amount of barbed wire, both in rolls and in Gabions to crush, or at least make it uncomfortable, the night-time activity of Russian patrols across the river, the laying of vast minefields, anti-personnel and anti-tank, the removal of the field of woods and bushes to ensure effective fire action of all weapons. Small efforts were also needed to improve the defense device, suggested by the knowledge of places and the enemy's deployment.

Lastly, the execution of blows over the Don would have responded to the need to keep the fighting spirit of the units, to attract as many opposing forces as possible, to disrupt their defensive preparations and to destroy the logistic resources.

Opposite of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, the 63<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Army deployed from north to south with the following units (see *Drawing No. 26*):

- 127<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, from Pavlovsk to Tciornaja Kalitva, opposite the 294<sup>th</sup> German Division;

- 1<sup>st</sup> Rifle division, from Tciornaja Kalitva to Krasnojarski, in front of the Italian Divisions *Cosseria*, *Ravenna*, *Torino* and part of the 62<sup>nd</sup> German Division;

- 153<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division, from Krasnojarski to Vescenskaja, on the front of the 62<sup>nd</sup> German Division and the *Pasubio* Division;

- 197<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, from Vescenskaja to the mouth of the Choper, in front of the *Pasubio* and *Sforzesca* divisions.

The strength of the two opposite positions, expressed in Divisions, was seven for the Italian side (8<sup>th</sup> Army) and four of that of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Army. Considering, on the other hand, the infantry regiments deployed online, the gap is less sensitive: 16 regiments to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and 11 for the 63<sup>rd</sup> Soviet, without considering the reserves of the Great Units and the artillery.

The Soviet Commands often tried, especially at night, the river's passage, with patrols of varying consistency, to identify the easiest passages. Those points had not been barred with barbed wire work by the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, as the reinforcement materials were still in route and their transportation was made more difficult by the recurring crises in the distribution of fuels.

In addition, the 63<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Army with had two other divisions in the second line: the 14<sup>th</sup> Guard and the 203<sup>rd</sup>, while the 8<sup>th</sup> Army had only the *Celere*, which made the two opposing sides in a nearly balanced ratio of forces: eight Divisions (of which six are binary) on the Italian side and six (of which one with two regiments) on the Soviet side.

### 3. - THE TASK

The German Army Group "B" had received from its Supreme Command, the main task being to reach the Volga in Stalingrad with the 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Armies, and then assume a defensive attitude towards the defense of the Army Group "A". It also had to defend Don's river line with the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian and the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, to which the well-known sector was assigned.

General Gariboldi had specifically expressed his disappointment because the Army at his command had been destined to be of secondary importance at a time of general offensive movements. He also cautioned the attention of the German Command on the disproportion between the broad front to defend and the few available forces.

On August 9, General Gariboldi went to Starobelsk, to the Command of the Army Group "B", to illustrate the reasons for the discontent already expressed, both in terms of the moral aspect of the unsuitable use and in the inadequacy of the task received and means to achieve it. He summed up the question, arguing that if the Soviet attack had not taken place, the deployment of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army on the Don seemed to be a waste of force, but that these would have been scarce to ensure the defense of the line if an offensive of the enemy had occurred.

The Army Group Command had contended that the defensive task on Don was very important, as it aided in the main action on the Caucasus, to which the Italian Army Forces were thus associated. In the event of a Soviet offensive against the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, the Army Group "B" Commander would have to send the means to deal with it. The 8<sup>th</sup> Army Commander had replied with the promise and added that he did not consider it a pleasant part to be destined to be saved.



Finally, from Rome, the Supreme Command, informed of the destination on the Don and the unpleasant impression that this had caused, had replied that what had been ordered by the German Commanders responded to preventative agreements established between the two Supreme Allied Commanders and had called on the Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army to execute the orders received.

#### 4. - PRELIMINARY ACTIONS

The deployment of the German units just arrived on Don, in the second decade of August was plagued by the on line arrival of the Italian Divisions of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

The Soviet Command was carrying out a series of offensive actions against the forces of the Army Group "B" to test its consistency and determine the point at which it would take action to halt the German advance to the Volga.

*August 12.*

In the late afternoon, a Russian patrol of a squad strength and a patrol rated to a company passed the Don's loop at the Krasnohorovka - Ogalev (III/82<sup>nd</sup> Infantry). They were caught under the fire of the 52<sup>nd</sup> artillery group in defense of the sector but did not retreat.

Late at night, the Commander of the Division ordered that a I/82<sup>nd</sup> company, already in second echelon, be transported so that it could intervene at the first lights of the next day,

*13 August.*

The Soviet offensive action was on the front of Army Group "B", north of the 8th Army in the Voronez area (2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army).

*Night on August 15th.*

Against the extreme right wing of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army (see Drawing No. 24), headed by the 54<sup>th</sup> Infantry (*Sforzesca* Division), immediately west of Simovski, made a attack against our center

of fire, but the prompt response of the defense was upsetting him. Our patrols, pushed just beyond the sector boundary, to the village of Bobrovski, heard distinctly boat noises and movements on both sides of the river. The captives taken claimed to belong to a unit of 70 men who arrived the previous day at Bobrovski and who had settled in a balka south of this settlement.

In the left-wing sector (53<sup>rd</sup> infantry), enemy patrols attempted unsuccessfully to infiltrate the Plesciakovski forest, at the left-hand margin of the divisional sector with the *Pasubio*.

*August 16.*

At Korotojak the forces of the adjoining 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army were attacked and they only restored the situation after two days of fighting.

*Night on August 17th.*

Attack against the *Sforzesca*. At the sector boundary between the two infantry regiments 53<sup>rd</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup>, considerable enemy forces passed the Don at hill 50.9 (north of Tjukovnovski) and others still to the east of Simovski. The Command of the Division, in order to better secure the joints between the two regiments, sent a 53<sup>rd</sup> company from the second- echelon battalion by carriage, reinforcing the 54<sup>th</sup> infantry with a Army Corps machine gun company, that the III horse artillery group, assigned as reinforcement by the XXXV Corps, took position in the field to increase the consistency of the eastern defensive flank.

Attacks and raids, which lasted throughout the morning of August 18, ended with the capture of 68 prisoners and various war material, but the loss of 23 dead (2 officers) and 49 wounded (4 officers) ). The prisoner's interrogation confirmed that the operation of the previous night had been conducted by two full Soviet battalions.

*August 17.*

At the first lights of the day, a Soviet patrol of about forty men, commanded by an officer and a political commissar (politrùk), boarded and sailed, crossed Don at Abrossimova and attacked a strongpoint of the 81<sup>st</sup> infantry , garrisoned over by the 6<sup>th</sup> company, being rejected. In the next round,

3 Russians were dead and 2 were taken prisoners. The defense suffered the loss of 2 dead and 2 missing.

At 07:30, other Soviet units of a couple of companies crossed the Don, attacking and encircling the village of Satonski, at the right-hand side of the 62<sup>nd</sup> German Infantry Division, held by a company. A small reinforcement, promptly rushed to unlock the encircled forces, did not succeed in the intent. A truck carried 80<sup>th</sup> infantry company, *Roma*, arrived at 13:15 on the spot and found the situation already restored by other German forces.

At 20:30 the enemy attempted a new passage of the river just west of Simovski, promptly rejected by the reaction of the defense.

Given the frequency of the enemy's actions and the local situation in order to obtain a shortening of the front, saving forces to the left side of the Division, with the consent of the XXXV Army Corps, the deployment of the right wing of the Division was lagging behind on the dominant buttresses of Simovski from the south, renouncing the material occupancy of the town.

*18 August.*

At 10.30 there was an attempt to pass on Don's right bank on the *Pasubio* front, in the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry sector. In the northeastern area of Ribni, the prompt intervention of the reinforcements and artillery repelled a force of about sixty men. Three boats were sunk by a anti-tank gun. Action Balance: 4 Russian deaths and 18 prisoners; seven injured and 39 wounded (2 officers) from Italy.

At 14:30 other Soviet elements tried to cross the river near Olscianski (sector II/80<sup>th</sup>) but were rejected by an effective artillery fire.

From the interrogation of a Russian deserter to the lines of the *Ravenna* Division, it was learned that the enemy had deployed on the lower northern slopes of the hill 220 two battalions of the 415<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment (1<sup>st</sup> Division), reinforcing them with accompanying weapons, essentially mortars.

*19 August.*

On the front of the *Ravenna* Division, the action of strong enemy patrols had been opposed.

On the front of the *Torino* Division, a Russian rifle company (6 officers and 80 men) attacked III/82<sup>nd</sup> at Ogalev and was rejected, leaving some prisoners. Also in the sweep were collected some rifles and a 50 mm mortar.

*Sforzesca's* artillery fought against enemy elements (infantry, artillery, and transport) moving on the right bank of Don and on the left of Choper, from Satalovski to the Simovski Forest.

The II/54<sup>th</sup> commander had reported that a submerged bridge in the village of Simovski allowed Russians to streamline the river's transit.

*Night on August 20th.*

At 22:10 the enemy, after intense preparation of artillery fire and infantry heavy weapons, passed Don's small loop into Merkulov. The attack, carried out by some 250 men of the 828<sup>th</sup> Soviet Rifle Regiment, was directed against the positions defended by the Croatian Legion, assigned to the *Pasubio* Division. At 00:45 hours the attack was stopped by the defense fire reaction.

At 22:30, in the sector of the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry *Ravenna*, an infiltration attempt was made emerging from islets of the Don at Kusmenkin, and another at 22:45 in the 38<sup>th</sup> infantry's sector at Gruscevo; one and the other promptly rejected.

The actions carried out by the adversary between 12 and 19 August, not only against the units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army, but also against the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian, were intended, as we have already said, to investigate the deployment on the right bank of the Don in order to identify the weaker point in which to repeat the larger-range operation attempted against the German Defense Force by the end of July. In that operation, the timely intervention of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division *Celere*, reinforcing the resistance of the XVII German Corps, had made Soviet success impossible. Now the adversary had analyzed the new situation and, taking the consequences, he was preparing to strike a new blow.

In some cases, the attention of the Russians had been turned to the banks of the river, as was already the case with Serafimovic, since a possible success would have facilitated the turning from the north of the discovered German wing and the new forces in that breach would have led to Kalac was the strategic isolation of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army (pushing towards the Volga, Stalingrad).

## 5. - THE BATTLE

Examined with an overall look, Don's first defensive battle, fought mainly by units of the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, took place in four phases:

- a. the Russian initial push (20, 21 and 22 August);
- b. Italian counterattack (23 August);
- c. the resumption of action by the Russians (24 and 25 August);
- d. the arrest of the offensive (26 August - 1 September).

### A) THE INITIAL RUSSIAN PUSH (Drawing No 27)

*August 20th.*

At 02:30, after a brief preparation of artillery and mortars, the Russians pass the Don on the ford and on the ferry and invest the sector under the auspices of the *Sforzesca* Division. Were attacked: The II/54<sup>th</sup> on the hills that dominate the south from Simovski, and in the section between Simovski and Krutovski; the III/54<sup>th</sup> between Satonski and Tjukovnovski, at the sector limit with the 53<sup>rd</sup> infantry.

The defense forces, with violent reaction of fire and movement, rejected the attacks twice.

At 04:30, the action also extended to the far left of the divisional sector (53<sup>rd</sup> infantry), at the limit with the *Pasubio* Division, at Plesciakovski.

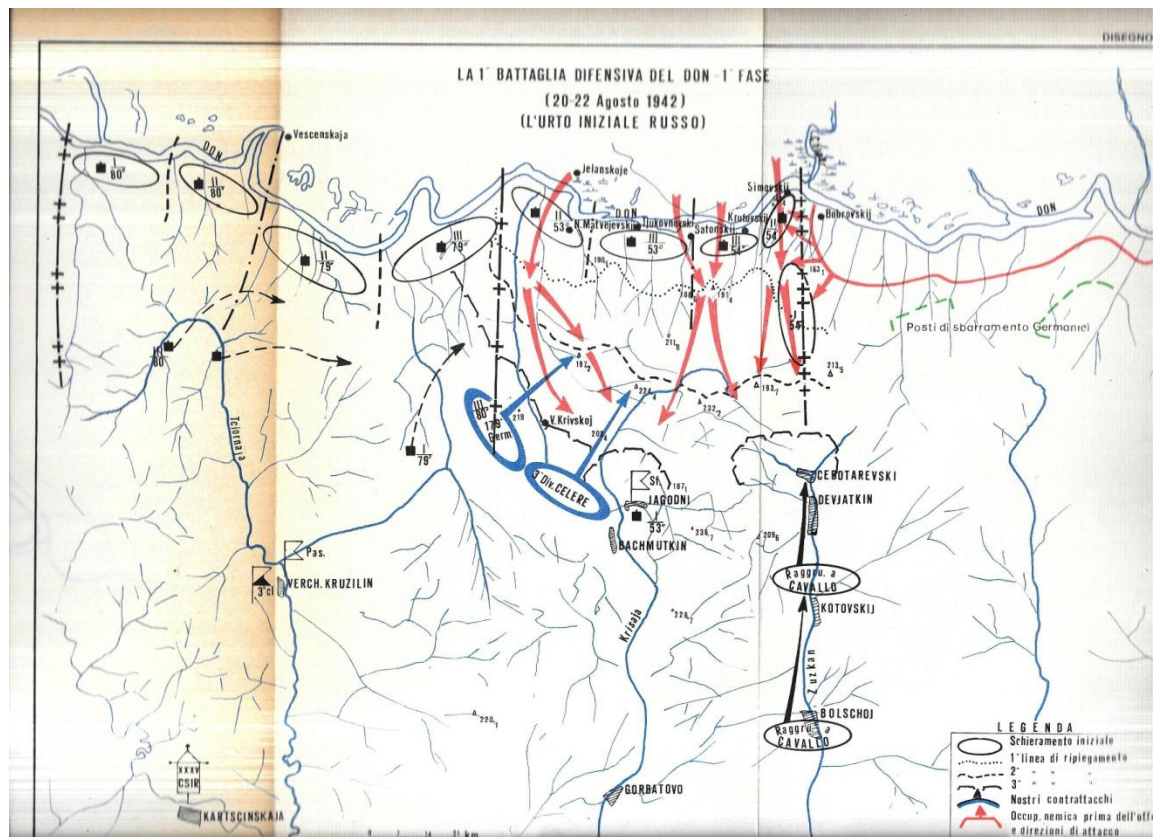
From the captives taken, it was learned that the attacking forces belonged to the 197<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division (828<sup>th</sup>, 862<sup>nd</sup> and 889<sup>th</sup> Regiments).

The enemy action was more pronounced against the II/54<sup>th</sup>, which was deployed to the right wing at Simovski. At this point in front, at 05:00, the enemy attack, renewed with fresh units, resumed with violence, coming also from the town of Bobrovski (sector of the 79<sup>th</sup> German Division) and from the balke upstream of the Don to the north and northwest, parallel the division of the divisional defensive flank. In this way the II/54<sup>th</sup> came to be surrounded. The Command of the Division sent a battalion reinforcement to a I/53<sup>rd</sup>, from the reserve at Jagodnyi.

Until 06:30, the Army Corps Command applied to the Army for Air Force intervention on the land adjacent to the mouth of the Choper, where there were strong agglomerations of enemy forces.

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.27



At 07:30, the Command of the XXXV Corps sent to the 53<sup>rd</sup> infantry reinforcement to a anti-tank company and two platoon flamethrowers; supported the II/54<sup>th</sup>, the most seriously threatened, with LXIII battalion of the CC.NN *Tagliamento* group. The battalion, lying along the balka that from Krutovsky was rising from Don towards the southeast, reestablished the continuity of the line, relocating to the left with the III/54<sup>th</sup>.

The I/54<sup>th</sup>, already faced eastward, received the order to make a conversion north and counterattack the enemy, pointing to hill 163.1 and Simovski. The Conforti (3) column was destined to operate on the right, with the task of hammering the surrounding terrain, heading north towards Bobrovski, to protect the right flank left uncovered by the absence of German forces. At the same time, the Army Corps Commander approved the counterattack arrangements and made available to the Division also the LXXIX CC.NN battalion, reinforced by the 75/32 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battery (201<sup>st</sup> motorized A/T artillery regiment); it drew attention to the necessity of pushing the infantry's counterattack and the concomitant action of the cavalry; presumed that the remaining forces of the Division would call upon the enemy's attention.

By the interrogation of a captured Russian officer, meanwhile, he knew that the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division of Guards was on the right side of the 197<sup>th</sup> Soviet Rifle Division. It seemed that two battalions of this Division were already in the northwest of Jelanskoje on the Vescenskaja track (that is, at the sectoral limit between the *Sforzesca* and *Pasubio* divisions). The same prisoner had claimed that artillery of 152 mm. and the XIII Armored Brigade (100 tanks) were also moved into the area.

At 15:30, the II/54<sup>th</sup>, with hand grenades, managed to escape the encirclement. In addition to the infantry of the battalion, they had taken part in the continuous contracts, lasting for twelve hours, the members of the O.C. patrols (4) Artillery, Medical Officers, Porters, Cookers. Of the 680 present at dawn, only 72 returned to friendly lines, moving to hill 163.1 south of Bobrovski, while the enemy is in the back of the hill 142.4 ridge. The Russians' action was momentarily contained.

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(3) From the name of the Commander of the I group of squadrons (I Group of Squadrons and 2 platoon machine gun of the *Savoia Cavalleria*, 1 platoon of 47/32 A/T, 3<sup>rd</sup> horse battery).

(4) For observation and connection with the rear artillery deployment.

At 16:00, although the required air bombardment on the opposite bank of the river had not yet taken place, the I/54<sup>th</sup> counterattack began. The opponent was rejected until hill 142.4, in view of the Don, while the *Tagliamento* group and the *Savoia Cavalleria* regiment protected his flanks. Soon afterwards, it became known that no air traffic could have taken place in favor of the ongoing counterattack, as the German bombers were engaged elsewhere and thus were the Italian fighter units, while the bombs were missing for the other Italian aircraft.

The reaction of the many weapons deployed by the enemy on the right bank, where it was firmly asserted, stopped at 22:00 the counterattack of I/54<sup>th</sup> to about 3 kilometers south of Simovski, at the head of the balka that descended on the village.

The Conforti column advanced up close to Bobrovski, but he could not keep up with the arrest of the forces on his left and because he was caught in the fire of the enemy reaction.

Meanwhile, at the center of the divisional deployment, at the limit of the two regiments, the situation had become dangerous. To cope with that threat, from 13:00 onwards the Division Command had been able to send all the remaining forces by truck: The I/53<sup>rd</sup> command with a rifle company, a 81 mm. mortar platoon and a 47/32 company with the task of blocking the origins of Tjukovnovski and of occupying the positions of hills 191.4 and 188.6.

Even the extreme left wing of the division sector needed to be strengthened; all the available men of the rear, officers and infantry of the Divisional Command and 2 platoons had to be employed with 62 engineers of the divisional company.

At the end of the day, the action of the enemy had been conducted by 7 battalions.

The Italian losses were very serious, especially for the 54<sup>th</sup> infantry, which had the II battalion reduced to the consistency of two platoons and the other two heavily experienced battalions.

However, the continuity of the front had been maintained and it was expected to restore its original, slightly affected performance by means of a new counterattack to be conducted in the next day. To this end, the Command of the XXXV Army Corps had placed at the disposal of the Division Command also the XV Sappers Battalion and the 16<sup>th</sup> chemical company.

The cavalry grouping (less the Conforti column) was close by Bolschoi on the Kotovski.



Also on the front of the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, the *Pasubio* Division overnight secured its right flank by moving the wing battalion to the right and forming a defensive flank with a reinforced battalion drawn from the second echelon.

On the front of the XXIX German Army Corps, only the *Torino* Division had to reject a late-night (at 20:30) a patrol who, after passing the Don with boats, had landed near Monastirstein.

The offensive of the enemy, already pronounced so intensely on the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, kept on the side of the contiguous XVII German Corps (as indicated by the sector of the 79<sup>th</sup> Division of the General Lombardi) had extended on the same day of the 20<sup>th</sup> also at the front defended by the II Corps.

At 03:40 and 04:30, in the verge of Verhnij Mamon, the enemy, preceded by artillery fire and mortar preparations, attacked the positions entrusted to the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry *Ravenna*, everywhere rejected by the actions of fire and the reinforcements of the defense (*Drawing No 28*).

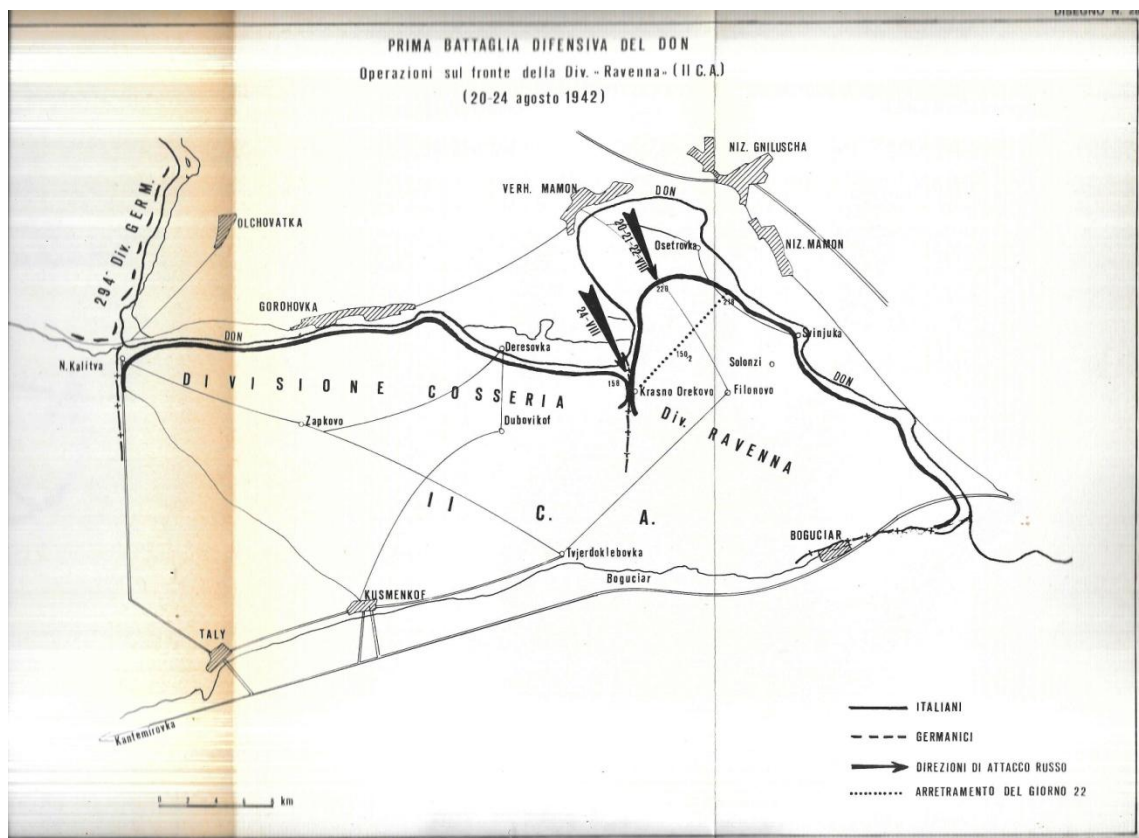
He returned to the attack at 05:30, breaking the line of resistance, but restored by 07:00. At the same time, without success, attempted another concomitant action from the hamlet of Ossetrovka against hill 218.0 (Eastern part of the loop base). The actions had been conducted by the enemy with forces evaluated at three battalions.

The Commander of the II Corps had a ready approach of the units at his disposal (Tactical Group *Valle Scrivia I*: V CC.NN battalion, reinforced by accompanying weapons).

At 10:00, even with new forces ferrying to Ossetrovka, the attack against the hill 220 was renewed from the west, north, and northeast, with violence so as to cause a battalion of the divisional reserve to move to the threatened point, since the line, with its wings had suffered a slight inflection in the center (south slopes of hill 220).

Consequently, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army Corps had the tactical group *Valle Scrivia I* pass to the *Ravenna* Division, which made it continue on Filonovo. The analogous group *Valle Scrivia II* (XXXIV CC.NN battalion reinforced) was also brought closer to the area of possible use, remaining available to the II Corps. The reserve of the right sector of the *Cosseria* Division (III/90<sup>th</sup>) was moved to Krasno Orechovo, in contact with the deployment of the *Ravenna*.

Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)  
Map n.28



At 13:30 the situation on positions of hill 220 was completely restored. In the areas occupied for such a short time, the Soviets had already laid down minefields.

A fifth attack was rejected in the afternoon (16:00). The action was repeated between 19:00 and 20:30, but after having suffered severe losses in violent body-to-body collisions, the enemy was rejected. The Russians desisted from their purpose, pursued with such perseverance.

*August 21st.*

For August 21, the Command of the *Sforzesca*, continuing the counterattack started in the afternoon before, was about to restore the line of resistance to the Don by three actions:

- on the right, I/54<sup>th</sup> (though it suffered serious losses on the 20<sup>th</sup>), with Simovski as the objective;

- in the center, in the III/53<sup>rd</sup> and in the XV Sapper Battalion, from the area of hill 190,1, with the objective of Nizne Matvejevski and Tjukovnovski, flanked to the right by the I/53<sup>rd</sup> (which would have acted from hill 191.4 and 188.6 at Satonski);

- to the left, the II/53<sup>rd</sup> reinforced by the 16<sup>th</sup> chemical company, with Plesciakovski as the objective.

The enemy, however, after passing the Don overnight another ten battalions, at the early light of the dawn moved to attack, relying heavily on artillery and, above all, mortars, preventing the Italian attack. The new Soviet Attacking Forces belonged to the 14<sup>th</sup> Guard Division (36<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment) and to the 203<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division (592<sup>nd</sup> Regiment).

The strategic aim of the attack, well-researched after consideration of the previous week, was known to the units employed: a prisoner during the interrogation on the night of the 21<sup>st</sup> had stated that the ultimate goal of the action was the liberation of Rostov .

Since the early hours of the morning the situation was very serious. If the wings were still on the starting positions for counterattack, the center was struggling to withstand and the danger of interruption of line continuity was being profiled.

The greatest effort of the enemy was exercised on III/53<sup>rd</sup>, and the battalion, supported by two sapper companies, was still holding the position.

Instead, the expected counterattack was started on the right, but at 07:00 it was already clear that the action would not reach the

objective; even in this stretch it was struggling to resist the heights.

The Army Corp Command decided to give up the counterattack on Plesciakovski and to defend the line of the Don's dominant hills (Nizne Matvejevski - hill 140 - hill 191.1 - hill 188.6 - hill 142.4); He also commanded the *Sforzesca* Command to work for the preservation of a defensive right flank at hill 163.1 (southern Bobrovski).

By 10:00, the I group of 105/28 of the 17<sup>th</sup> division artillery, which had already had to defend itself by firing at zero, withdrawal from a desperate resistance of the III/53<sup>rd</sup> and the Sappers, it moved on the more backward positions. The subsequent withdrawal of the two battalions and the I/53<sup>rd</sup>, already deployed to the right, resulted in a wide solution of continuity in the deployment of the two regiments of the Division infantry.

The interruption of telephone lines and the destruction of radio stations as a result of the opposing shooting, the difficulty of communicating with other less rapid means determined by the distances that existed in such a large area, besides the urgent rhythm of the attack, had made it less readily available action of the Division Command. However, he had not failed to inform the Army Command and, worried about the hole that was being established between the two regiments, as the losses already suffered mainly by the 54<sup>th</sup>, had ordered that the LXXIX CC.NN. battalion (of the *Tagliamento* group), which was located in second row to the right wing, moved to the center where it would occupy the positions between hill 191.04 and hill 188.6, by the establishment of a strongpoint in order to maintain junction between the two regiments 53<sup>rd</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup>. But the battalion, when executing the movement, came to hill 232.2 encountered the advancing enemy that intended surround them. It had to hold the attack first, and then fall back to the right sector on hill 193.7. The Commander of the XXXV Army Corps (5) affirms in this regard: "... the battalion was facing the heroically critical situation: it is necessary for the conscientious sacrifice of its soldiers whether the enemy, as a result of the arrest immediately, did not succeed in advancing the right wing of the deployment in the late afternoon".

In the meantime, the same purpose for the threat to the center of the *Sforzesca* sector, the Commander of the Army also made available to the Division even the mounted forces still available.

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(5) MESSE, op. cit., page 206.

The *Lancieri di Novara*, at dawn, moved from Gorbatovo to Bakmutkin and Jagodnyj, where they arrived at 12:00, reinforced by mortars, anti-tank pieces and a group of horse batteries.

They were immediately detached:

- to the left, the Morcaldi column (II squadrons group reinforced), directed to hill 187.1 (north of the town). A patrol detachment at 12.30 hours met on the eastern slopes of hill 208.4, the III/53<sup>rd</sup>, which was withdrawing south. There were no other units in the east of Krisaia. The detachment, which reached 4 kilometers north of Jagodnyj, met strong fire reaction of the advancing foe south of the ridge of hill 224.4;

- to the right, the Column Del Re (1<sup>st</sup> squadron reinforced), reached hill 232.2, encountered a strong reaction of fire that prevented it from continuing.

The regiment commander ordered the exploration detachments to slip from the north of hill 187.1, connecting to the left with III/53<sup>rd</sup>, lying west of Krisaia, on the north - northeast slopes of hill 218.9, connecting to the right with the *Savoia Cavalleria* regiment. The horse artillery group took a location southeastern of Jagodnyj, where the Regiment Command remained with the remaining forces available (Pagliano column).

The *Savoia Cavalleria* regiment was directed towards the right of the Division, in the Zuzkan valley. In that area it was already from the day before the Conforti column, which at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> also operated in the area of hill 163.1 together with LXIII CC.NN. Battalion.

The rest of the regiment, under the name of the Bettoni column (regimental command, II squadron group, and ½ machinegun squadron, 2 anti-tank platoons and 1 horse battery) at 13:00 moved from Kotovski to Cebotarevski.

At 14:00 a patrol, sent in exploration on hill 232.2, informed the Command of the grouping that they found little south of hill 236.7 a hundred infantrymen commanded by a captain, almost free of ammunition and retreating.

General Barbò ordered that they set themselves on suitable positions in those nearby.

The Bettoni column, directed by Cebotarevski on hill 232.2, collided with the enemy and took position, cooperating with infantry units that were defending Cebotarevski.

At 16:00, the Army Corps commander set up the Cavalry grouping at the disposition of the *Sforzesca*, so that, by concerted action, coordinating the intervention of LXXIX CC.NN battalion and two companies of the 53<sup>rd</sup> infantry, reached the position of the front from hill 190.1 to hill 188.6.

Also on the right the Conforti column received an order to withdraw, even under the enemy pressure. The squadrons offered mutual support during the swings back to reach the unmounted horses. The 1<sup>st</sup> squadron had to fight to recover its horses, already reached by the enemy. A piece of the 17<sup>th</sup> artillery was rescued by a handful of mounted cavalry who charged with the sabers to the hand. The house battery supported the movement of squadrons effectively. The 1<sup>st</sup> squadron had to return to the charge in the night to release the pieces of a divisional battery from enemy pressure.

At 19:00, the Conforti column had reached its place in the defensive line again taken over by *Sforzesca*.

By now, both the XXXV Army Corps Command - CSIR, as well as the *Sforzesca* Division, had already used all of the scarce reserves initially available.

For the left-wing sector (53<sup>rd</sup> infantry), which was more confined to the West than the *Pasubio* deployment, the worst was the worries, even though the enemy, for the whole day, had exerted strong pressure on it, rejecting the II/53<sup>rd</sup> from Nizne Krivskoj's positions five kilometers south, up to Verhnij Krivskoj, where the battalion effectively resisted.

The situation at the center of the divisional sector, with its position of tense resistance and in the process of being restored, was, without a doubt, the most serious of the whole front.

The right wing of this sector, already initially isolated, shattered by enemy attacks from the north and the east, was also in conditions of extreme difficulty. Isolated units, heavily reduced by losses, sought to open the pace of fighting often by hand to hand.

The severity of the situation led the Commander of the Army Corps to:

- constitute two defensive pillars at Jagodnyj and Cebotarevski, who were also assigned a counter-offensive task;
- to retract the right wing of the *Pasubio* Division, defining it as a defensive side along the alignment Ribni - hill 219.0

and in tactical connection with the Pillar of Jagodnyj, at the head of the Olikovatka Valley.

The cavalry regiments of *Savoia* and *Novara* had to watch the interval between the two defensive pillars of Jagodnyj and Cebotarevski, that is, to fill the gap better, waiting for new forces to seal the leak.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command, in turn, made available to the XXXV Army Corps the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division and the Alpine Battalion *Monte Cervino*.

At 22:00 the *Sforzesca* Command issued its own Order of Operation (*Document No. 74*), which executed the Army Corp Commander's defensive concept.

On the night of the 22<sup>nd</sup> there was a difficult operation for the deployment of the units deployed from Simovski to the south, obstructed by the attacks of the enemy coming from the west and northwest:

- hill 232.2 was already heavily occupied by the enemy;
- Russian infiltrations were about 2 km south of hill 163.1;
- the I/54<sup>th</sup> was fighting during its withdraw from Simovski to Cebotarevski;
- the LXIII CC.NN., already deployed to the north of the balka, which stretched from Krutovski to the south-east, was still fighting on those positions;
- The LXXIX CC.NN., reduced to a hundred men, still fought a little east of hill 193.7.

On the front of the II Corps the enemy had resumed its offensive activity by attacking the positions of hill 220 at 05:15, at 12:50 and at 23:30. The *Rauenna* forces had rejected the three attacks. The *Cosseria* Division had not been attacked.

*August 22<sup>nd</sup>.*

The hours of the night on August 22 were used to collect the units in the Jagodnyj and Cebotarevski Jagods. It would have been, in any case, to take a stand in the open country, because the wooden structures of the houses would not have allowed the defense to support the centers.

At the first lights of August 22:

- had been collected in the strongpoint of Jagodnyj, the 53<sup>rd</sup> infantry regiment and part III/54<sup>th</sup>, the remains of the XV Sapper battalion,

the 3<sup>rd</sup> flamethrower company, with a total strength of 3,500 men, 71 light machine gun, 30 machine guns, 16 mortars of 81, 6 pieces of 47/32, 31 flame throwers;

- into the strongpoint of Cebotarevski was still flowing the I/54<sup>th</sup>, deployed on the ridge north of the village the II/54<sup>th</sup> and the part of the III non-deployed in Jagodnyj (400 infantry between the two battalions); the CC.NN *Tagliamento* group, in the second line (in total 200 men of the Battalions LXIII, LXXIX and LXIII, accompanying weapons, but without heavy weapons) and some reinforcement units. Altogether about 1,000 men, 9 light machine gun, 21 machine guns, 27 mortars 81, 2 pieces 47/32;

- The *Sforzesca* Command had settled in Gorbatovo;

- between Cebotarevski and Bolschoi there was a stumbling blockage of the baggage train and lorries, exacerbated by the presence in the Bolschoi of the combat baggage train of the 54<sup>th</sup> Infantry.

The numerical superiority of the Jagodnyj stronghold had immediate consequence greater chance of work, unlike what was occurring Cebotarevski, where also the only human energies were three and a half times lower. Another element made the situation of the eastern strongpoint more precarious: that of not being able to make a system with the resistance position of the *Pasubio*, from which some help could come. Moreover, the ridge between Kriuscia and Zuzkan, crossed but not possessed by the mounted regimental group and on which the enemy had exerted the greatest effort of the previous day, separated Jagodnyj from Cebotarevski; this second strongpoint was also isolated on the right to German units that did not help the nearby Italian Division.

The afternoon hours were used in hasty efforts to strengthen which, due to the limited amount of time available, could guarantee poor infantry shelter for their people and did not always assure their weapons of rational and effective use.

At 14:00, the Jagodnyj strongpoint was violently attacked by enemy forces from the center of the sector (east side of the strongpoint) and in the same area, in the direction of hill 224.4 to hill 218.9 were also attacked the *Lancieri di Novara*. The combined action of an armed squadron to engage the enemy in front of him with a charge after another squadron momentarily repulsed the attacker who returned, however, with greater strength. The resistance at this point had to be continued little south of hill 218.9, while the rest of the line maintained the positions.



Toward 16:00 this cavalry regiment was bombed by mistake by allied aircraft. Particularly affected were the lorries and the horses that, in flight, caused confusion in the rear.

An enemy push infiltrated into Krisaia's balka had reached the village of Jagodnyj, and was rejected by the personal intervention of the Commanding Colonel who, gathered around him the Regimental Command staff, some elements of cavalry, infantry, sappers and immediately supported by artillery, intervened by stopping the attempt.

At 18:00 the attack was unsuccessful interrupted by the enemy, which captured a hundred prisoners and numerous booty.

Even Cebotarevski's strongpoint was simultaneously attacked for about four hours, without real success. The remains of the II/54<sup>th</sup>, from the positions of hill 200.1 (northwest of Cebotarevski), moved on to hill 209.6 (southwest of Cebotarevski), continuing their resistance. The enemy had left over 400 bodies counted.

Even the mounted regimental grouping, neatly, under enemy pressure, had to move its resistance south, on the north slopes of hills 236.7 and 209.6. The cavalry regiments were connected with each other and with the 54<sup>th</sup> infantry, protected by the cooperative artillery.

As the *Lancieri di Novara* had already operated on the left, the *Savoia Cavalleria* left the static position occupied and, mounted on horseback, with a large diversion around Devjatkin, re-established the situation. Once the horses were watered, the riders took back their positions in the defensive line.

From the early hours of the morning the Lombardi Group, the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division, came to the area. In the afternoon most of the Division was collected in the Kruscilin area (*Pasubio* sector). The Commander of the Army had ordered that besides the *Celere*, the Alpine ski battalion *Monte Cervino*, the IX Battalion of Bridging Engineers (located in second echelon) and the 179<sup>th</sup> German infantry regiment (with only two incomplete battalions) collected from the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division. In order for this to be able to give its assistance to the *Sforzesca*, the Command of the German XXIX Corp arraigned that the *Torino* Division replaced two groups of the 162<sup>nd</sup> German artillery, with two of its 52<sup>nd</sup> artillery, from the I Battalion of the 81<sup>st</sup> Infantry.

The Army Corps commander did not use the reinforcements received to defend the defensive line, especially since, due to the width of the front, a real solidity of positions could not be achieved. An attack that took the force of the Bersaglieri as an element of strength and supplanted with it the limitation of the mass, could have set a arrest phase for the Soviet advance, given breath to consolidate the defense and to take measures that were revealed necessary.

On the front of the *Pasubio* Division, the deployment alignment operations at the right-hand side of the sector, to keep in touch with that of *Sforzesca*, were carried out regularly in the early hours of the morning.

At 13:30 the enemy attacked with infantry forces the defensive positions at hill 219 (III/79<sup>th</sup>) on the new line occupied, at the sector limit with the *Sforzesca*. The infantry collided impetuously, struggling hand to hand, and at 19:00, they rejected the attacker, causing the loss of 200 dead and capturing 45 prisoners. The Italian losses were of 12 dead (2 officers) and 40 wounded.

In the nearby sector (II/79<sup>th</sup>) an opponent's infiltration attempt was promptly rejected with the loss for the enemy of some drowned in the Don and the capture of five prisoners.

On the front of the II Army Corps (*Ravenna* Division), at 03:10 the enemy made on a strong attack on the possession of hill 220. He was able to seize some fire centers. In order to recover them, the Division Command had to use another battalion (III/38<sup>th</sup>). The divisional reserve was reduced to a single battalion.

The Army Corps Commander had the *Valle Scrivia II* tactical group move up but, in doing so, he would shortly be deprived of any reserves for the sector of the two divisions. Therefore General Zanghieri, also recognizing the importance of hill 220, invited General Nebbia to judge whether the continuation of the struggle for possession of that position would lead to excessive and too rapid depletion of reserves.

The Commander of *Ravenna* communicated that he was forced to retreat from the defense of the resistance line: Krasno Orekovo-hill 150.2 - hill 218.0, placing an ordered movement for breaking

contact, retreat, and taking on a new positions.

To better ensure that the delicate operation was carried out safely, at 13:00, the II Corps commander also had advanced the *Leonessa II* tactical group.

The movement was carried out regularly in the evening.

## B) THE ITALIAN COUNTER ATTACK (Drawing No 29)

*August 23rd.*

The day of August 23 is marked by the Italian attempt to restore the initial situation on the right bank of Don.

Quantitative insufficiency had been demonstrated for this task of the *Sforzesca* Division units alone, although reinforced by the supplementary ones of the XXXV Corps (the mounted regimental grouping and the *Tagliamento* group). The assignment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division, albeit diminished in its efficiency from the previous long wear, offered the Army Corps the means to try to return to the river line, to which the German Supreme Command and the Command of Army Group "B" attributed so much importance.

The night on the 23<sup>rd</sup> was quiet, but early in the morning the strongpoints of Jagodnyj and Cebotarevski were again strongly attacked. The enemy was rejected with many losses, largely due to the effective shooting of the 17<sup>th</sup> artillery.

Meanwhile, the counterattack was in preparation, starting from the left of the *Sforzesca* and the *Pasubio* Division.

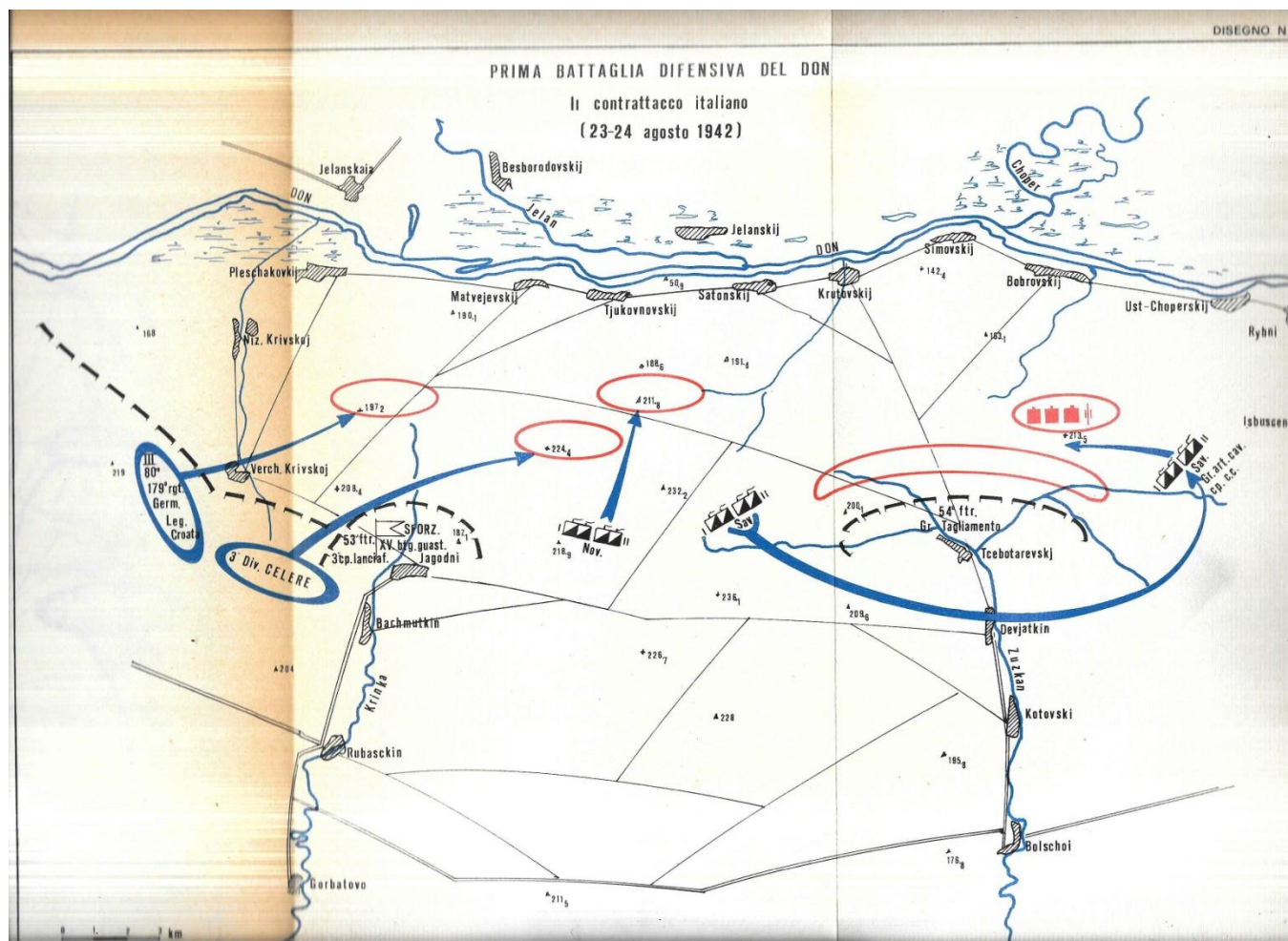
General Messe, who intended to coordinate the action directly, had fixed his sight of the high ridge dominating the Don as the target of attack.

For the execution, they were constituted:

- a column on the left, under the orders of General Roberto Olmi, commander of the divisional infantry of the *Pasubio* (with III/80<sup>th</sup>, Croatian Legion, 179<sup>th</sup> German infantry regiment and two German artillery groups of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division) operating from the area of hill 219 (west of Verhnij Krivskoj). The I/79<sup>th</sup> would also cooperate on attacking hill 197.2, as would II/79<sup>th</sup> on hill 168.0;

- a right column under the orders of General Mario Marazzani, Commander of the *Celere* Division, consisting of the whole

## Map n.29



Division, operating from the west of Bachmutkin, in the direction of hill 208.4 - hill 188.6 - hill 191.4.

The Jagodnyj strongpoint would assist with its artillery to support the *Celere's* attack.

The *Monte Cervino* battalion, located in the Gorbatovo area, was supposed to aid against a possible counter-offensive on the right.

The Cavalry Regimental Group would have to intervene for the exploitation of success, for the execution of an already outlined double action enveloping.

The infantry forces of the two strongpoints would have carried out short-range raiding operations but had, above all, to resist the oppression if the adversary had attacked first.

Start of the attack: 09:45 hours.

The left column at 12:00, passing beyond the balka Olkovatka, had occupied Verhnij Krivskoj, finding it untouched, and hill 197.2 overcoming weak resistance, while the III/79<sup>th</sup> was on the southeastern ridge of Rubescinski.

The right column had a deep attacking device with the Felici column: 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri reinforced with XX/3<sup>rd</sup> and XXV/3<sup>rd</sup> battalions in the first row, followed by two battalions of the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri and reinforcement elements in the second echelon.

Reserved, in turn, articulated: 1<sup>st</sup> echelon (Salvatores) with Bersaglieri battalions XVIII/3<sup>rd</sup> and XIX/6<sup>th</sup>, attested at the kolb Otbelaize; 2<sup>nd</sup> echelon (Rubini) constituted by XLVII Motorcycle Battalion, arrested at Verhnij Kruscilin.

The Felici column proceeded quickly to hill 208.4 (northwest of Jagodnyj), but from that point, under increasingly intense artillery fire, which was soon joined by the mortars, suffered increasing losses and proceeded more slowly. At 14:45 hours, also with automatic weapons, posted at hill 224.4, made a move to circumvent the height from the east. At 15:30, ascertained by the exploration that the nearby hill 232.2 was unmasked, the column was moved between this and hill 224.4, while the two echelons of the reserve advanced respectively to hill 208.4 and the Otbelaize kolkhoz.

At 16:00 the XX and XXV/3<sup>rd</sup> battalions moved from the southeast to attack hill 224.4, followed by VI and XIII/6<sup>th</sup>. The enemy developed a very strong resistance, focusing on the southern slopes artillery fire, mortars and machine guns. At 17:00 the top of the hill was taken, with an assault on

bayonets and hand grenades. The 120<sup>th</sup> artillery groups took up more advanced deployment.

The Salvatores column, just come on hill 208.4, was repeatedly attacked, with severe losses for both sides.

Further north was also attached hill 197.2, held by the German 179<sup>th</sup>.

The enemy managed to capture it at about 16:00, but 179<sup>th</sup> regained it and then held possession of the height.

It was difficult to preserve what had been gained, because the fire of Russian mortars opened up gaps in the Bersaglieri's ranks, as the assault waves were rejected without interruption.

At 21:25, Colonel Felici, with the column under his command was with both flanks exposed, ordered the disengagement from the enemy to take a new position slightly further south, on hill 218.9. The movement, carried out after the 01:00 of August 24<sup>th</sup>, was a success and the units could undertake ready-made reinforcement work and establish a connection with Jagodnyj's strongpoint.

At the end of the day, the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* had lost 28 men (2 officers), 263 wounded (17 officers). The *Pasubio* had 31 dead, 213 injured and 65 missing.

The Commander of the XXXV Army Corps had the transfer of the 179<sup>th</sup> German Regiment (Colonel von Alberti) to the dependencies of the *Celere* and ordered that in the following day August 24 the attack of hill 224.4 was resumed in three columns:

- 179<sup>th</sup> infantry, from hill 197.2;
- Salvatores column (6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri), from hill 208.4;
- Felici column (3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri), from hill 218.9

As the advancement of the attacking columns was still developing without serious difficulty, at 11:45 hours, General Messe set forth the next development of the action by assigning to the Cavalry grouping the task of a thrust to the left flank of the enemy, leading to hill 213.5, passing south and southwest of Cebotarevski, to compete with the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* the conquest of hill 191.4 and, if possible, act on Krutovski.

The *Novara Lancieri* were heading towards hill 191.4, passing by hill 232.2, but they only reached hill 211.8. Threatened to be overwhelm here, they had to retreat overnight until they reached the northwest part of Cebotarevski.

The *Savoia Cavalleria* Regiment had the task of reaching hill 213.5 and to push on at the next dawn on to hill 193.7 to threaten

to throw back the Soviet units that pushed on Cebotarevski and to protect the right flank of the Italian deployment. Using his own exploration, he found that the northwestern slopes of hill 213.5 was occupied by substantial adversarial forces. Arriving at night, thought it was not convenient to continue the movement in the darkness, the regiment stood on the southeast slopes of hill 213.5.

On the front of the German XXIX Corps, and particularly in the sector of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division, the enemy had led two thrusts from the forest north - west of Merkulov, in the direction of hill 120.8, at the sector limit with the *Pasubio*. Both were rejected.

The same Army Corps, on that same day, had also cooperated with the action of XXXV - CSIR by sending the 179<sup>th</sup> Regiment (2 battalions) reinforced by 2 artillery groups, taking them all from the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division.

The *Torino* Division, though not having sent units into the XXXV Corps sector, had replaced the German artillery groups by sending the III/52<sup>nd</sup> divisional artillery (75/27) and the XXIII/2<sup>nd</sup> Army Corp (105/28) in reinforcement from the II Corps.

In the II Corps, the *Ravenna* Division proceeded with the defensive organization of the new occupied positions, while the enemy did not develop offensive actions either on this Division or on the *Cosseria* or on the 294<sup>th</sup> German Division.

The 79<sup>th</sup> German division, in its "intermediate report", at 17:20, reported "about 100 Russians with motor vehicles advancing from hill 163.1 (3 km south of Bobrovski) toward the southwest". The news had to follow the command line and had arrived at the German attaché's office of XXXV Corps out of time to be reported to the Cavalry grouping, and particularly to the Commander of *Savoia Cavalleria*: this was directed at hill 213.5, on which it would have to be necessarily also the anti-tank units, whose vehicles could not cross the balka on their left.

The same German Division also indicated the presence of 5 Soviet tanks south of Satonski and the presence of walking forces in the rough ground between Isbuscenski and Senjutkin, that is, in the sector of the German Major Unit.

The success sought by the counterattack of the XXXV Army Corps had not yet been complete, even though it had fought generously to get it.

The day of August 24 was opened by the continuation of cavalry actions, particular importance is the charge of Isbuscenski (6).

The march of the Bettoni column (*Savoia Cavalleria*, reinforced by the 2nd horse artillery group and back anti-tank cannons) on hill 213.5 had been observed by the enemy on the same evening of August 23<sup>rd</sup>. To cope with that threat, the Soviet Command strengthened its deployment by shifting a battalion from the northwestern positions of Cebotarevski, making it take a large roundabout to Bobrovski, whereupon, for the balka with north - south direction it was driven to the north - east of hill 213.5. It arrived at 02:00 and at 03:30 his men had dug deep holes. Other two battalions of the 812<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment took position with south-east facing near the hill.

At 03:30 the explorers of the *Savoia Cavalleria* regiment, moving northwest and north, at the beginning of their advance, were taken by violent fire reaction of mortars and automatic weapons completely concealed by vegetation.

This fire action of the enemy responded to the immediate reaction of artillery, anti-tank guns and machine guns still in place from the night as the squadrons were about to move. The sudden and strong Italian reaction baffled the adversary and reduced the intensity of the fire. The commander of the regiment, as the intensity of the enemy fire did not seem to diminish, immediately decided to counterattack frontally with the 4<sup>th</sup> squadron, on foot and reinforced by machine guns, pushed to the northwest to hill 213.5 to engage the enemy forces deployed there.

Colonel Bettoni, then, to make the surprise, launched the 2<sup>nd</sup> squadron on horseback on the left flank of the enemy deployment. Having made a wide turn, the squadron fell on the battalion, overwhelming the infantrymen by saber and continuing its impetus even against the other two battalions. Since the enemies, who ducked into the holes at the passage of the charge, had resumed shooting

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(6) The town where the squadrons of the *Savoia Cavalleria* took place were marked on topographic map 1:100,000 then in use as "hill 213.5", 7 kilometers southwest of the Isbuscenski town center (sector of the 79<sup>th</sup> German Division).



on the rider's rear, the squadron made an evolution that reversed it on the same ground, performing a second charge, completed by the launch of hand grenades.

The battalion on the left, the first to bear the shock, remained overwhelmed. His survivors drifted south east, captured by the Germans of the 79<sup>th</sup> Division, and others withdrew north and northwest.

The other two battalions, though having suffered losses, reacted with energy, and Colonel Bettoni then decided to continue from a more advanced position the blocking action carried out by the 4<sup>th</sup> Squadron and repeat the charge using this 3<sup>rd</sup> time. This was also joined by the command of the II group. The second charge of the 3<sup>rd</sup> squadron also the two remaining battalions were definitely overwhelming.

At 06:30 the battle was over, the regiment remained the master of the land, which was sweep, while the enemy led only a sporadic artillery action on it.

The action, carried out with determination and timeliness, cost the enemy, from a quantitative point of view, the annihilation of more than a battalion (250 dead on the ground, 300 prisoners in Italian hands, in addition to those captured by the 79<sup>th</sup> Division, numerous heavy weapons and automatic, light weapons), and the serious disorganization of the other two. The tactical consequences consisted in the relaxation of the pressure of the Russians on Cebotarevski's strongpoint and in the total liberation of the position of Isbuscenski, occupied by the Germans, while the regiment continued to exert the threat on the flank and on the enemy's rear.

The Italian losses, in relation to the result achieved, were not very serious: 32 dead (3 officers), 52 wounded (5 officers), 100 horses out of combat.

### C) THE RESUMPTION OF ACTION BY THE RUSSIA

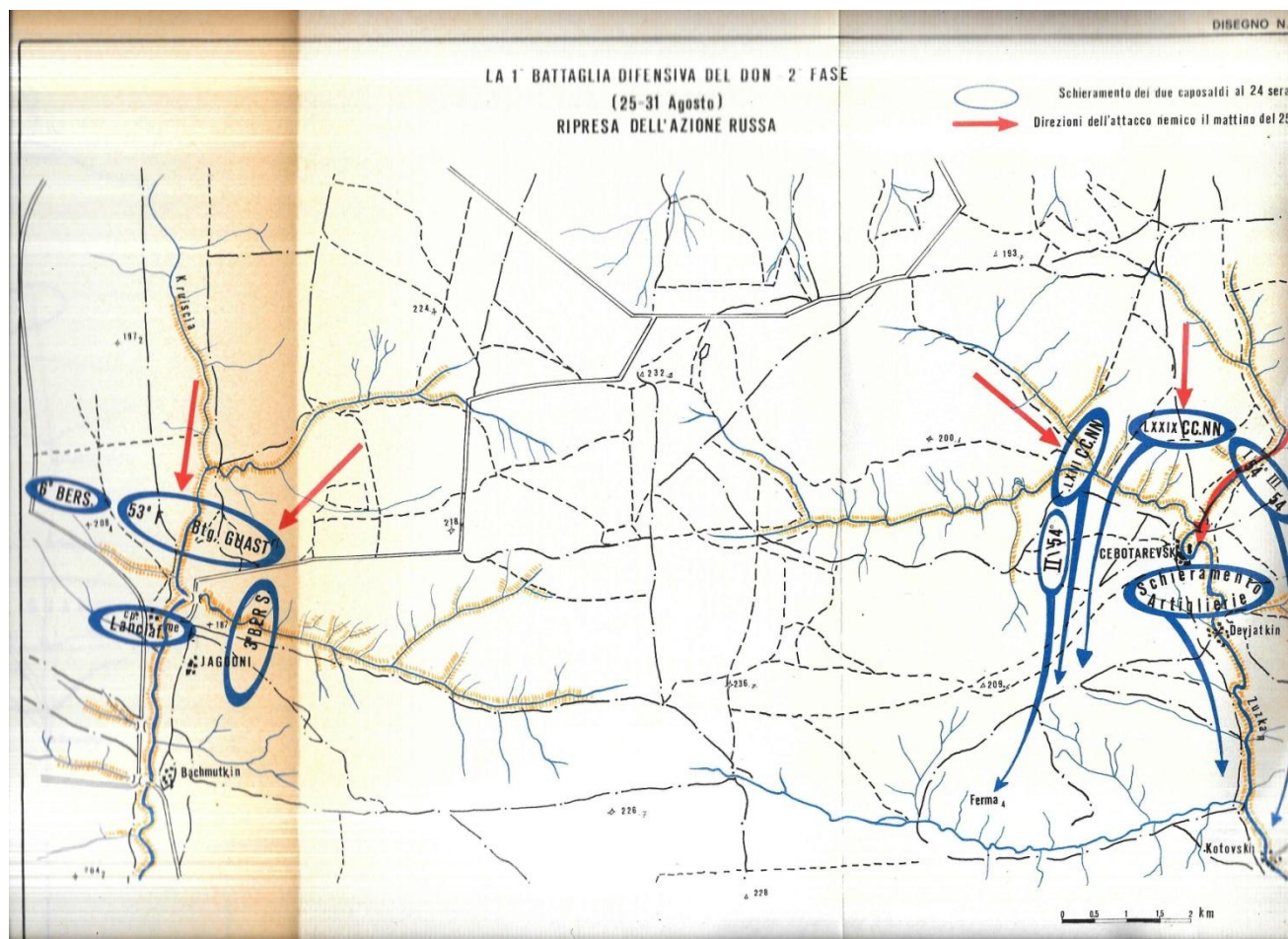
*(Drawing No. 30)*

*On August 24th.*

In the morning of August 24, the forces of the XXXV Army Corps-CSIR were deployed on the heights of the line hill 197.2 – 208.4- 218.9, which conferred on the strongpoint of Jagodnyj greater consistency and more effective reaction capacity.

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n. 30



The possession of the height of hill 213.5, ensured by the action of *Savoia Cavalleria*, was another positive element in the overall picture.

The Commander of the Corps could not however overlook the fact that there was no possibility of rapid expansion of the forces at his disposal and that the enemy ones were constantly increasing, while the previous and excessive usage of the *Celere* battalions could no longer be offset by their moral forces. Likewise, the small forces on horseback were by their nature unable to last long in such a costly action of energies for men and for horses. Until the night, he had decided not to keep what had been achieved on the day of the 23<sup>rd</sup> and the early hours of the 24<sup>th</sup>.

The adversary, for whom it was of great importance to crush the attack on Stalingrad and the Volga, led by the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, threatening the rear, in the afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup>, began its offensive, having exercised during the morning a constant pressure everywhere on the front employing new units, while others were reported in turnout, according to the assertions of the prisoners, confirmed by aerial observation.

At 13:00, with a force evaluated at 3 battalions (7), the enemy attacked hill 208.4, coming from north and east, strongly supported by artillery and mortars. The ready and effective reaction of the XVIII/3<sup>rd</sup> and XIX/6<sup>th</sup> rejected the enemy, preventing him from reaching his goal. But he repeated the effort, and for over six hours, around hill 208.4, alternating attacks and counterattacks, which caused heavy losses to both parties. The 889<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment (197<sup>th</sup> Division) was almost destroyed.

Towards 21:00 the action moved to the right wing of the *Celere*.

Other forces, equal to 3 battalions, attacked hill 219.9 positions, beyond which, to the strongpoint of Cebotarevski, there were no Italian forces. Strong enemy elements, with the favor of darkness and tall grass, infiltrated the sector held by the XIII/6<sup>th</sup> and opened fire behind the Italians. The crisis was aggravated by the fact that the commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri and two battalion commanders had been injured. The Command passed to the Battalion Commander alone.

The adversary acted on the positions of the III/120<sup>th</sup> artillery and the I/201<sup>st</sup> anti-tank artillery, which defended their pieces with hand grenades.

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(7) They probably belonged to the 216<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment, of which Soviet prisoners, until the morning, had signaled the presence in the Balka Olkovatka, along with three other battalions.

It was indispensable to order the withdraw, ordinarily executed by the units, on hill 187.1, where they would be included in the defense of the strongpoint of Jagodnyj.

During the day, the *Celere* Division suffered losses for 15 dead (3 officers), 194 injured (11 Officers), 31 missing (1 officer).

There were no significant operations in the sector of the German XXIX Corps.

In the sector of the II Corps, however, at 08:00, enemy forces attacked the positions of Krasno Orechovo, on the western side of the verge of Verhnij Mamon; at the sector limit with the *Cosseria*.

After two hours of fighting they managed to reach the town, contained by the defense in the site and by the intervention of the reinforcements.

The Commander of the Corps accepted *Ravenna's* request to intervene a second-echelon battalion of the *Cosseria*, which was the III/89<sup>th</sup> *Salerno*.

At 14:00 the situation was re-established with the reoccupation of Krasno Orechovo and the withdraw of the enemy beyond the Don.

*Ravenna's* losses, including for previous days' actions, were 48 dead (10 officers), 296 wounded (13 officers), 65 missing.

The enemy had carried out operations with the 1<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division's forces, which faced *Ravenna*, reinforced by a battalion of 619<sup>th</sup> rifles (203<sup>rd</sup> Division).

That situation could be said to be re-established, as it was stated that hill 220 had been ceded and not conquered. But if it had not been ceded, the enemy would have found enough strength to conquer it, and not only the II Army Corps, but the same 8<sup>th</sup> Army Forces, who also saw the XXXV Army Corps at that time, would not have could find the forces needed to man the defense of that position.

The loss of hill 220 was a sensible advantage for the enemy. The retreat of the artillery from the initial deployment took place at the top of the loop, not only of the 75/18 guns, but also of the 105/28. Only the 149/40 would be able to beat that objective, but their shooting could not be observed and corrected from the ground and they would have to resort to aerial observation, impossible at night, not always possible by day, conducted by reconnaissance aircraft that would have to be escorted by fighters and whose availability depended on factors outside the Major Unit from which batteries depended.

The almost total invulnerability of the transit of the Don in the adjacent areas of Ossetrovka placed the enemy in the condition of being able to stage in Verhnij Mamon's loop how many forces he judged necessary to conduct an offensive action while the Italian resistance to the line of the loop he did not have much more power even after the brief shortening of the front, as the divisional sectors were always the same.

*August 25th.*

At dawn (03:30) on August 25<sup>th</sup>, the enemy's action was resumed throughout the sector that the *Sjorzesca* was sharing with the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere*. The greatest effort was exercised on the weakest point. Cebotarevski and the associated strongpoint of hill 209.6 initially had 1,000 defenders and a number of weapons of far lesser extent than that of Jagodnyj. Cebotarevski was also isolated on the right, for the empty void to the 79<sup>th</sup> Division, and to the left, for the infiltration on the ridge between Zuzkan and Kriuscia, which isolated it from the rest of the Division. In addition, five days of struggle had further reduced the internal defense forces to the strongpoint and on the outside the only aid could be provided by the action of the Cavalry grouping that, however animate, if carried on horseback could not be constant, if conducted walking would only be carried out by small forces.

The strongpoint was invested simultaneously from the north, west and east, with the obvious threatening intention of isolating it. The fire and counterattack reaction of all defenders emerged generously and resulted in the result of a slowdown in the attack.

The artillery's deployment was in grave danger. The artillerymen were reduced to defend their pieces with machine guns, carbines, grenades, to make the order to move to more backward positions. A single piece of the III horse artillery group was lost for the death of the towing horses under enemy fire. The 17<sup>th</sup> artillery, without fuel, made the withdraw of the pieces towed by hand.

The enemy's forces broke into Cebotarevski fighting house to house, and the fight went a little further south to Kotovski. Mule drivers, drivers, mess hands, dispatch riders all contributed with every energy to slow down the enemy's advance.

The *Lancieri di Novara* were willing to help against the enemy at the bottom of the valley Zuzkan, which precisely that regiment

was meant to block. *Savoia Cavalleria*, intended to operate from hill 213.5 on the left flank of the attacking columns, isolated from the Russians' breakthrough, flanked the *Lancieri di Novara* in the delaying action, to which they all participated.

The defenders of hill 209.6 briefly moved south - west to Stop 4.

In this situation, the Commander of the XXXV Corps, from 06:40, turned to the spirit of collaboration of General von Hollidt, Commander of the German XVII Corps, for whom, a few weeks earlier, had worked so well the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division and that he had so little to keep the ground on his left flank from enemies, so it continued to be seriously threatened by the XXXV Corps. The 79<sup>th</sup> Division's request was totally missing, even in a symbolic way, although at 08:10, had been announced the preparation of an intervention group at Kalmikovski.

It was opening up, thus, a dangerous gap between the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army and the German 6<sup>th</sup> Army. If the enemy had taken over Gorbatovo, he would have arranged, with that crossroads, the head of the Kriuscia valley, and could have turned the Jagodnyj strongpoint and the right wing of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army from the south.

The consequences of the maneuver of the enemy should be avoided. Early in the morning, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army relayed to the Commander of the XXXV Corps the order of the Command of Army Group "B", in which, amongst other things, he said: "... No one is to retreat from the present positions *stop* Everyone who orders it is liable to severe sanctions ... *stop*" (Document No. 75)

Informed of everything by the German liaison officer and the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, expressing their consent, General Messe decided to retreat the defense on the western side of the Kriuscia valley and to form a new strongpoint in Gorbatovo, south to that of Jagodnyj, so that by the execution of these measures could be a defensive flank for the whole 8<sup>th</sup> Army and a safe base from which it could start a future counteroffensive to return to the right bank of Don.

The Cavalry grouping would stay out of this defensive line, shutting down the Zuzkan valley at Bolschoi with the *Novara*, appropriately reinforced by means of fire, trying to connect east with the German XVII Corps. The *Savoia Cavalleria*, on the other hand, would have carried out wide-ranging exploration in favor of the Gorbatovo strongpoint.

The greatest concern was not so much from the tactical situation but from the general physical exhaustion of the fighters, after an unbroken effort that had come to the sixth day. In this way, Lieutenant Colonel Elchlepp, of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Operations Office, spoke with Major Fellmer, who saw the perilous danger of his Major Units. All the available forces were engaged and no other (the first Alpine battalions) would have taken their place until the 27<sup>th</sup>.

The forces of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division were also attacked by 09:00. At first, XXV/3<sup>rd</sup> was invested in the positions of hill 187.1, just north-east of Jagodnyj, without result. The planned retreat of the German 179<sup>th</sup> from hill 197.2 to Verhnij Krivskoj had taken place without inconvenience, under the protection of the Alpine of the *Monte Cervino* battalion. The XLVII motorcycle moved to Bachmutkin. The losses had been serious (4 dead, 14 injured, 2 missing).

Towards the end of the day, the Commander of the XXXV Army Corps reported to the Army Command (*Document No. 76*) on the execution of the orders given and on the immediate prospects of the action.

In the *Pasubio* sector an attempt to bypass at night (01:00) of hill 219.0 (III/79<sup>th</sup>) with a moving attack from hill 204.8 had been fired at 05:00. Prisoners captured announced for the next day the influx at Nizne Krivskoj for their new regiment. An attempt against the II/79<sup>th</sup> was done using a dense mist on the Don. The enemy had passed the river by boats, landing at Gromok, but was rejected, losing a hundred deaths (including a “politruk” - political commissar) weapons and ammunition. ther minor attempts had been thwarted.

In the sector of the German XXIX Army Corps, the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division conducted the action of eliminating of the enemy forces infiltrated on August 23rd in the wooded area of Merkulov. That is why General von Obstfelder had determined that the Torino Division would contribute to the operation with an infantry battalion (I/81<sup>st</sup>). This, during the action on the northern slopes of hill 120.8, in the thick of the forest, had started the action with great impetus, but, caught under frontal and enfilading enemy fire, after reaching the Don, it found himself lacking in the amount of accompanying weapons necessary to counter it and had lost connection with the flank units.

There were no major events in the sector of the II Corps, either on that day or in the following.

D) THE ARREST OF THE OFFENSIVE  
(*Drawing No. 31*)

*August 26th.*

The decision of the XXXV Corps Command to continue the resistance on the west side of the Kriya Balka, moving, in defense of the Gorbatovo crossroads, the units that had garrison of the Cebotarevski strongpoint, prompted the intervention of the Command of the Army Group "B".

Until the afternoon of the 25<sup>th</sup>, he had informed Generale Messe of his disagreement about the order of withdraw, which the General had considered to have to keep in order to protect his right flank, keeping at least the Kriuscia valley to prevent the total annihilation of the entire Corps.

On the same evening, the German liaison officer at the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command, Major of the General Staff von Gyldenfeldt, informed Major Fellmer of the likelihood that the sector in which he was fighting - in the *Sforzesca* sector - had been placed under the orders of the nearby German XVII Corps. He added that new units would soon arrive.

At 20:15, the Chief of Staff of the XVII Army Corps warned Major Fellmer that the *Sforzesca* sector would have shifted from Italian dependence to direct German dependence, even by changing Armies. It was this clear manifestation of mistrust towards the Italian Commanders.

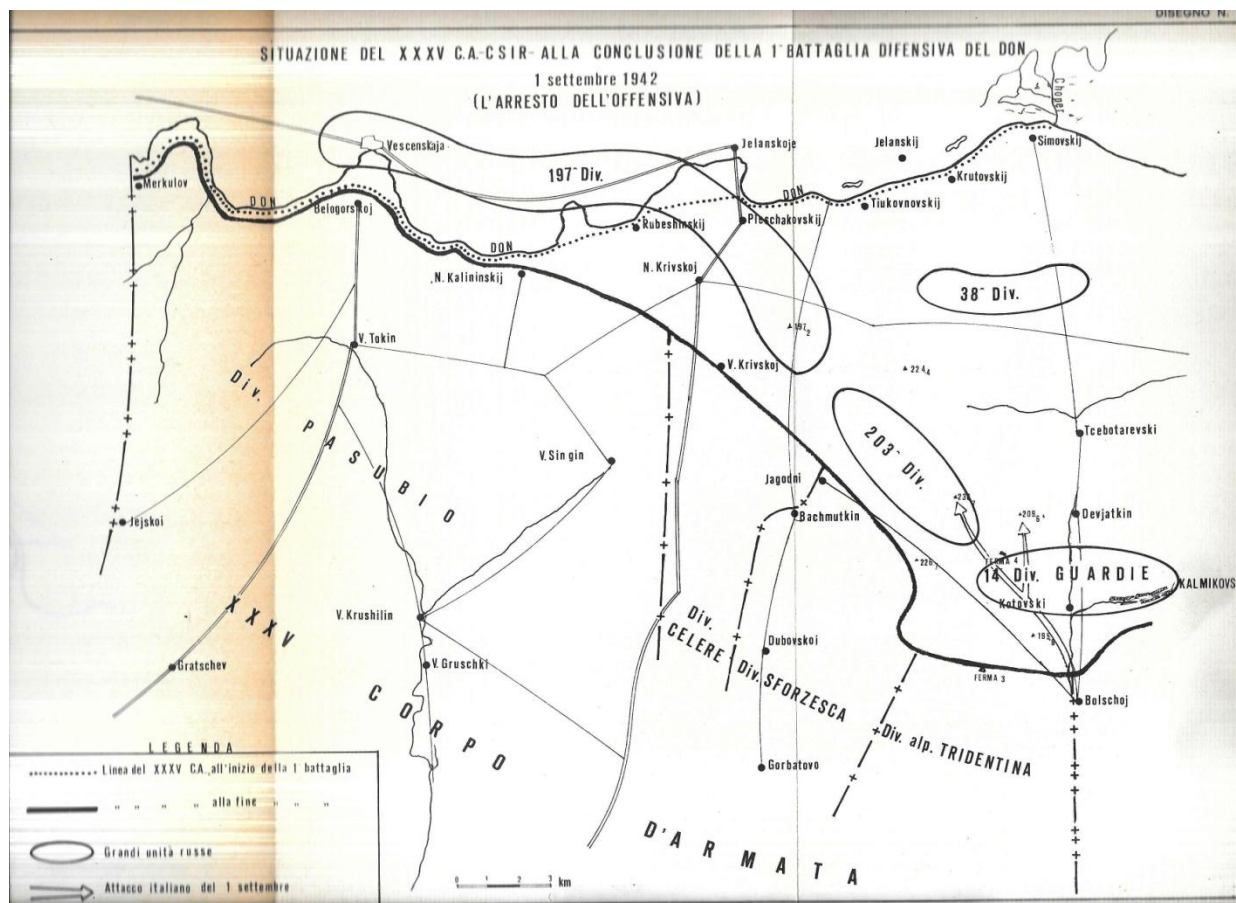
The Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army on August 26<sup>th</sup> communicated to General Messe without indicating the timing of execution of the order, which, therefore, the Command of the XXXV could not distribute to the dependent units.

At 02:00, Colonel Gschwandtner, of the Command of the XVII German Corps, appeared at the Command of the *Sforzesca* Division to communicate the change of dependencies.

Faced with the latter, General Messe, in a large conversation with the German liaison officer (07:00), summarized his intentions on the conduct of the ongoing operations, its provisions and the execution that the same they have had.



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)  
Map n.31



The Germanic Officer was adamant that, in the situation in question, his orders were "to be considered fully satisfactory" (*Document No 77*)

Immediately he addressed the Army Command to know the cause of the measure and informed him that he had not given it because the arrangement received during the night did not indicate the modalities and execution times (*Documents 78 and 79*).

At 08:30 the Army commanded the units that went to the orders of the XVII Corps, which had had the task from the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Command to prevent an enemy breakthrough in the direction of Bokovskaja and to "stop at all costs the withdraw movements of the *Sforzesca* Division" (*Document No. 80*), with this message being effectively completed and clarifying the previous one, but it was attributed to the *Sforzesca* that had arbitrarily acted upon a retreat of his units.

When executing the order, General Messe expressed his protest against what had been ordered by the Army Group Command and sent to him by the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command, sending General Gariboldi the following message: "I am abstaining from entering the merit of the tactical reasons that have suggested to the Heeresgruppe Group "B" the dependence of the sector already assigned to the *Sforzesca*, but I note that the second task entrusted to the Command of the XVII German Corps is implied by an ingenious and totally unfounded assessment of the harshness of the fights and the contention of the troops who, under my orders, have lasted, valiantly and bloodily fighting for six days an overwhelming enemy without receiving any external help. In the name of the dead and alive, as Commander, as a direct witness and as Italian I must raise the most vibrated protest against the insinuation that the repatriation of these heroic troops exhausted and decimated was voluntary and necessary a German Commander to call them to duty. I ask to personally confer with Your Excellency. General Messe".

General Gariboldi replied: "Since the situation is not convenient Your Excellency to leave the command post to confer. I have already made the necessary comments to the bodies of the Army Group. Now it matters to win".

At 08:15 the Command of the XVII German Corps emanated his first order to the Italian units passed to his dependencies. He intended to occupy those fronts from Jagodnyi to Bolschoi, totally modifying what was already in place since the previous day and assigning tasks disproportionate to the possibilities

of execution. General Guglielmo Barbò, commander of the Cavalry grouping, came to make direct contact with Generali Conradt (Commander of the Alpine Army Corps) and von Blumentritt and agreed to not move the units from the deployment into action. On the other hand, the offensive action taken by the enemy made it even more impossible to change the deployment.

At 08:30 on August 26, large infantry forces attacked the deployment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* from the north and then from the east, contented and rejected by the tenacity of all the fighters, sustained by artillery and Italian and German aviation, which proclaimed serious losses to the attackers. The assaults were repeatedly repeated without success, and the enemy carried out an attempt to divert from the southeast. Occupied at about 11:00 around the town of Bachmutkin, the assailants continued southwest on the slopes of hill 204.2, threatening the artillery deployment positions and the same strongpoint of Jagodnyj.

From the hill 204.2 position, however, the XLVII motorcycle battalion moved to counterattack for Bachmutkin's recapture, while I Group of the *Savoia Cavalleria*, with what remained of II/54<sup>th</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> motorcycle company, stormed from north to south. The enemy, taken between two fires, retired from the height and then also from Bachmutkin, chased until hill 226.7, east of Bachmutkin, by the II Group *Savoia Cavalleria*, that intervened on the initiative of its commander.

In the afternoon and up to the advanced night, the enemy attack moved to the northern section of the line on hill 204.8 (I/79<sup>th</sup>) and at Ribni (III/79<sup>th</sup>), but even in this point it obtained no result.

At the end of a tough day of fighting, the *Celere* Commander told the Commander of the XVII German Army Corps that after a full day of combat, in which the Division, in cooperation with the 53<sup>rd</sup> Infantry and the 179<sup>th</sup> German Regiment, had been attacked by five Soviet organically complete infantry regiments, supported by regimental and divisional artillery, the line defended by *Celere* was intact. The Division had suffered about 300 losses, but had captured 500 captives and copious booty of heavy and light weapons.

In the XXIX Army Corps, at the border between the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division and *Pasubio*, continued the mopping up of Merkulov's loop, with the I/81<sup>st</sup> of the *Torino* taking part.

The Army Command put at the disposal of XXXV Corps the few other forces it had available on that day: first the Bridging Battalion, then the *Morbegno* Alpine Battalion (*Tridentina* Alpine Division), moving them to Singhin, in the *Pasubio* sector.

*August 27th.*

The first part of the night on August 27 was calm.

At 01:00 the strongpoint of Jagodnyj was vigorously attacked in the eastern part. The enemy, was rejected, retreats from northeastern, but did not get better against the front defended by the XXV/3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri. The action, backed by artillery, was won by aviation, which appeared from dawn in the sky of combat.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of the day, it had to be executed at the orders of the XVII Corps, left open to face the attack the previous day.

The battalions of the *Tagliamento* group and I/54<sup>th</sup> (8) battalion from Gorbatovo were to be transported to the P.T.F zone, to occupy the ridge between hill 226.7 and hill 200, on the ridge between Kriuscia and Zuzkan. The recon showed the presence of the enemy on hill 228.0 and that contrasted the advance, which in the evening had reached the hill 200 area.

At 12:00, when the forces of the *Siorzesca*, the *Celere* and the Cavalry grouping had rejected the attacks of the morning, the Commander of the XVII Army Corps, General von Hollidt, ordered that the sectors held by the *Celere* and *Siorzesca* pass to Orders of Major General von Blumentritt, Superintendent General of the German Supreme Command, who was visiting that track of the front.

In this document, while it was acknowledged that the Soviet attack was conducted with the force of 5 Divisions, he asserted in a contradictory manner to be the "weak forces".

General von Blumentritt, in charge of the Command of Units located in the new section of the Sector, recognized by the XXXV Italian Corps, was assigned as reinforcement: the *Lancieri di Navara* Regiment (which would already have been under his orders), the promise of employment (with constraint) of a German regiment and two artillery commands, without batteries. German forces moved to the new dependency were

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(8) The entire 54th infantry regiment was reduced to 400 infantrymen in those days, and the whole group of three (3 battalions) to 300 men, all exhausted from the struggles of previous days.

made up of the only the 179<sup>th</sup> Regiment which has been cooperating with the XXXV Corps for some days.

To exercise the Command just to confer it, General von Blumentritt came to the Command of the *Celere*, where General Marazzani, having found that he was a lower rank officer, refused to transfer to the orders of this and informed General von Hollidt the refusal and the reason for that decision, obtaining the cancellation of the previous order.

After a month, at the request of the Command of the XXXV Corps, General Marazzani summarized the whole episode (*Document No. 81*), pointing out that the transitory presence of General von Blumentritt had not given rise to any order for Italian units.

In the afternoon of the same day, 27<sup>th</sup>, the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* received the LXVII Bersaglieri armored battalion, just arrived in Russia, assigned to it by the new organic constitution. The 5<sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment (*Tridentina* Division) It was to meet complete in the second echelon waiting to participate in the next counteroffensive.

By the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup>, Army Group "B" Commander canceled their order by which the units of the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR had been transferred to the XVII German Army Corps. It was work of simple justice, because in those two days of struggle nothing had been changed by the directives of the Command to which the units had been taken away, not a man or a weapon had been assigned by the Command to which those same units had been subjected. Only an unnecessary measure had been adopted for the conduct of operations and capable of causing harmful moods among the allies.

On the front of *Pasubio* were rejected nocturnal attacks against III/79<sup>th</sup>.

On the front of the XXIX Army Corps, the units sent in reinstatement to I/81<sup>st</sup> were returning to Torino, which operated in the sector of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division in Merkulov, where the enemy had left the Don's right shore at night, leaving more than 300 dead and losing 102 prisoners on the ground, while considerable were the losses also in the case of the I/81<sup>st</sup>. This battalion, after returning the reinforcement units, remained in the guarded area.

It had suffered the loss of 31 dead, 71 wounded, 24 missing, having captured 50 prisoners, including a battalion commander.

*August 28th.*

At 04:30 on Aug. 28, General Messe summoned the Command of all units in the sector that had been the *Sforzesca* Division's and operations were opened by a violent attack brought by Soviet forces against Jagodnyj's strongpoint. These were the two rifle regiments, 610<sup>th</sup> and 619<sup>th</sup>, reinforced by a machine gun battalion and a pupil NCO battalion of the 213<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division. The action of the attack from the north also involved elements of the 899<sup>th</sup> rifles.

Jagodnyj's defensive strongpoint was attacked on all sides, except the south. In the alternate vicissitudes of the struggle, on the front defended by the XXV/3<sup>rd</sup> to the east of hill 187.1, the enemy managed to seize some fire center. Stalled by artillery with a strong repression shot, yielded in front of the counterattack performed by the reinforcements, formed by the elements of the services of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri. The situation was restored. The attackers lost many dead, 400 prisoners and abundant material. Given the worn-out situation of the XXV Bersaglieri Battalion, this was replaced in the morning by the *Monte Cervino* Alpine Battalion. In these actions was injured also the interim commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri; the third Commander hit in only August.

From the strongpoint of Gorbatovo, at 04:00, they moved the remains of II/54<sup>th</sup> to go to hill 226.7, which was not occupied by *Savoia's* II group, which controlled it from other site locations 3 kilometers further east, and they conquered it by pushing back considerable enemy forces.

At 04:15, the II group of *Savoia* intervened against the left flank and the rear of a Russian column pushing to Bachmutkin. The prompt reaction failed to surprise the enemy and forced him to give up the attack.

At 06:00, appeared in the sky of the Italian and German aviation formations and stayed there for a long time, aiding in the ground battle.

At 16:30, what was left of the *Tagliamento* group occupied hill 288.0, taking the enemy by surprise and putting it on the run. It was immediately replaced by the I/54<sup>th</sup>, which promptly began strengthening work, to make system with hill 226.7 and

with the defense of Bolschoi, held by formation elements of the 54<sup>th</sup> Infantry and the *Novara* Regiment.

The only the *Celere* Division, on that day, had suffered the loss of 36 men (2 officers), 176 wounded (5 officers), 16 missing.

On that day, the XXXV Corps Command Information Office, through the comparative interrogation of prisoners, stated that:

- the forces used by the enemy from August 20 to the south of the Don were 26 battalions belonging to the 197<sup>th</sup> and the 203<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division and the 14<sup>th</sup> Guards, as well as two battalions of the 304<sup>th</sup>, deployed on the front of the XVII German Corps;
- the losses suffered by the Soviet units were high: among the most worn-out were the Rifle Regiments 592<sup>nd</sup>, 862<sup>nd</sup>, 610<sup>th</sup>, 819<sup>th</sup> and 812<sup>th</sup>;
- Russian soldiers would operate under the pressure of the "politruk" and that, in order to prevent retreats or desertion, the newly-formed "barricades" were used by the fighters behind them;
- Some officers had given news of the influx of some Asian divisions heading north of Serafimovic.

In the *Pasubio* sector, the enemy carried out two distinct actions: the first at the first lights of the day against the III/79<sup>th</sup> in the area of hill 188.8, rejected in the afternoon, and the second, in the morning against hill 204.8, rejected in close combat by the Croatian Legion.

The *Vestone* alpine battalion also came to the field, alongside the *Morbegno*, both at the command of the XXXV Corps.

A counter-offensive action was being prepared which, taking advantage of the slowdown in the attacks of the enemy, improved the current situation, not excluding that favorable circumstances would also allow the reconquest of Don's bank.

The arrival in the area of *Tridentine* alpine was the main attack mass, which, together with the armored battalion, with all the other units present, would have carried out that task.

The Commander of the Army, subordinating the use of those alpine and armored units to their own personal authorization, watched that contingent demands would not distract those forces from the main task assigned to them.

Nothing would have been worth, however, an action limited to the XXXV Corps, if the XVII German, resolving the situation that was the basis of what had happened since August 20, had not given up its assistance, with infantry forces, but above all with armored forces due to its presence in its sector of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division.

The attack had been initially planned for August 29, but on the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> the XVII German Government announced that it was unable to act at that date, but in the near future that was not yet specified. The time of momentary arrest would have been employed by the Italian units to develop their logistic device.

There were no major operations in the sector of the XXIX Army Corps.

#### *August 29th.*

On the day of August 29, the offensive activity of the enemy became even less intense than in the previous one.

Only the action of fire and the raid of an isolated aircraft, which did not cause damage, were carried out against Jagodnyj's strongpoint.

An action of the Soviets against the positions of hill 226.7 was rejected.

Bolschoi's defense rejected an attempt against the 54th Infantry unit.

The exploratory patrols of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* were able to define the course of the enemy's positions: the northern slopes of hill 197.2 – the grove 1 km north of hill 208.4 - hill 218.9 - head of the balka east of Jagodnyj.

The activity of the Italian Major Units of the XXXV Corps was now all about the next counterattack action, which, in intentions, would have had to improve the still somewhat precarious general situation.

No major events had occurred at all the other Army's Major Units.

The preparation of the offensive continued to be made clear in the contacts between the contingents of the Army Corps Commands.

General Messe represented at the XVII Corps that the German assistance could have been very profitable if it consisted of an action against hill 232.2 (east-northeast of Cebotarevski), so threatening the deployment of Russian artillery, to avoid the Italian attack being reduced to a simple frontal effort, with little chance of success.



Late evening the XVII Corps specified that:

- the action would be carried out with the forces of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division and with a reinforced regiment of the 79th Division;

- the starting point would be in the northeastern part of Kalmikovski (east of Kotovski), with the objective of regaining the hill 217.4 and 193.5 line, connecting to Cebotarevski with the Italian units;

- an desired thrust of the Cavalry grouping from Bolschoi on Cebotarevski was wanted and that Italian forces supported the movement on the heights west of Cebotarevski.

Basically, if the intervention of tanks with a power greater than that of the L/6 (6.8 tons) tanks of the Bersaglieri was ensured, and the participation of forces on foot, the concept of a convergent action was rejected, favoring the Italian units, would have allowed the collapse of the Soviet deployment.

Instead, it wanted to do a parallel action, not unnecessary for the Italian one, but less advantageous than that required by the Commander of the XXXV Corps.

*August 30<sup>th</sup>.*

On August 30, early in the morning, the enemy attacked positions of hill 228.0 and hill 226.7, but was readily rejected. The tactical connection between these two positions was better ensured by the displacement of III/54<sup>th</sup> to the head of the balka south of hill 226.7.

In the afternoon, in view of the imminent offensive, the *Vestone* and *Val Chiese* alpine battalions moving respectively on the reverse side of hill 228.0 and in the Bolschoi area.

Meanwhile, the organization of offensive action was proceeding.

The Army Group "B" Command had expressed its consent to the arrangements established between the two Armed Forces concerned.

The units involved in the attack had been brought closer to the area of employment.

In the evening, in order to assure the Command of the XXXV Corps the time to take all the necessary prepositions, the Chief Operating Officer of the XXXV Corps and the Chief Operation Officer of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army agreed (*Document n. 82*) to execute to the Order of the Army Group "B": (1 September

- 05:00 - Combined action between XXXV Corps - CSIR and the 79<sup>th</sup> Germanic Division.”

This would have aimed at the heights of hill 220 and hill 206.3. Assuring possession, the tanks would continue from hill 206.3 onto Kotovskí, to connect with the Italians.

The XXXV Corps would have the objective of hill 226.7 to hill 228.0, to Kotovski, to connect with German tanks north of the town.

The German aviation would carry out bombing. The attack had to act fast enough to get the surprise effect.

*August 31<sup>st</sup>.*

On the day of August 31<sup>st</sup>, the Soviets did not undertake any major actions either on the front of the XXXV Army Corps or on the other Italian divisions.

For the Italian side, on the other hand, all the energies were directed at the action set for the next day, that is, the occupation, in conjunction with the XVII German Corps, from the ridge that by hill 228.0 goes down to Kotovskè (including the inhabited area).

Limited-action objective, at least in the first place, but that the Italian will to be well-represented, after the criticisms of previous days, was driven to try to expand if just an initial success brought the opportunity to it.

Army Group "B", by the 30<sup>th</sup>, had sent its very short Operation Order.

Even the XVII German Corps had issued their own on the same day of the 30<sup>th</sup> and supplemented it with the executive provisions to obtain the best cooperation with the XXXV Italian Corps. It was the translation into the orders of the agreements established the previous day with the Italian Command intended to cooperate.

The XXXV Army Corps Command - CSIR, in turn, issued its own Order (*Document No. 83*) which, while allocating the respective units to conduct the action (alpine, tank and artillery), provided a wider vision of the action, informing on the intervention of the German ground and air units, allowed us to see more broad possibilities of "if the enemy falls back, exploit the success until the occupation of the hills south of the Don". With that the return of the tactical situation would be re-established, but also a moral situation, especially after the unequivocal statement of the Army Group Command.

A telephone conversation between the Chief of Staff of the XXXV Corps and the Commander of *Sforzesca* indicates how carefully the action was prepared at each level of Command, although the infantry forces destined to execute it were in all two battalions (*Document n. 84*).

Before the *Sforzesca* Commander also deployed his Operation Order (*Document No. 85*)

*1<sup>st</sup> September.*

In the sector that the 3rd *Celere* Division had now assumed, to the left of *Sforzesca*, where the main action of September 1 was to take place, appropriate measures were taken to support it.

Strong patrols would move to the front positions, while a column at the orders of the commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment, formed by the battalions *Edolo* and *Tirano* and the LXVII Bersaglieri armored Battalion (less the company involved with the *Sforzesca*) would be ready to push on hill 197.2, to fall on the slopes of hill 224.4.

Even during the night on September 1<sup>st</sup>, the enemy had carried out an ordinary activity on the front of the XXXV Army Corps (as in the rest in other areas of the 8th Army) an ordinary activity.

At 05:10, the Bolschoi strongpoint signaled the start of scheduled air bombardment by German aeronautical units (12 bombers and 8 fighters). The delay in their intervention also delayed the start of the attack, which could move at 05:35, preceded by short artillery preparation.

The *Vestone* battalion moved with the 54<sup>th</sup> company to the right on the objective of hill 195.8, meeting with considerable resistance. The 55<sup>th</sup> company, with the support of the tank company (less one platoon), won Stop 4 at 08:00, making contact with hill 195.8 slopes with elements of the *Val Chiese* battalion, arrived at Kotovski. The 55<sup>th</sup> company was in support.

At the news by observers that reported the enemy withdrawing from hill 195.8 and that German units occupied the Kalmikovski settlement, the Colonel Commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment ordered the *Vestone* battalion to pursue second-tier objectives, assigned by General Barbò (responsible for coordinating the action of the alpine battalions with that of the support elements) and that is:

- with the 55<sup>th</sup> company, left, from Stop 4 to hill 236.7;
- with the 53<sup>rd</sup> company, on the right, on hill 209.6;

- with the 54<sup>th</sup> company in support (after being overtaken by the 53<sup>rd</sup>, because already strongly tried by the attack on hill 195.8).

The battalion commander united the alpine troops of his Command to constitute support with fresh elements.

The wave of L/6 tanks of the LXVII Battalion preceded the company that attacked hill 209.6. The strong reaction of the enemy directly directed against the tanks resulted in a withdrawal of these, but the Alpine managed to be successful at 10:30, and then maintain the possession of the height, despite violent oppression of the enemy.

The 55<sup>th</sup> company, at 10:30, surprised at hill 236.7 an enemy battery, annihilated the servicemen, captured the 4- 76 mm pieces, but was heavily counter-attacked on the left flank. The supporting action of the German armored formations on Kotovski had not yet been pronounced.

At 11:00 the Command of *Sforzesca*, in order to link the occupation of hill 236.7 with that of hill 226.7, ordered that the III/54<sup>th</sup> would move to the left of the *Vestone* battalion, reinforcing the occupation of hill 236.7 and contacting the left with the I/54<sup>th</sup>, placed in the garrison of hill 226.7.

While this movement was about to be executed, it was reported that German infantry and tank units, instead of occupying the Kalmikovski settlement, had stopped at the eastern edge of it. Therefore, the company of the *Val Chiese* battalion, which was strongly obstructed on Kotovski, had to fall back on the starting point and the other company of the same battalion that had already occupied hill 178.1, also counter-attacked by overwhelming forces, had to leave the position, withdrawing on the southern slopes of the ridge.

Meanwhile, the *Vestone* company left behind hill 236.7 was violently overwhelmed.

It was necessary to prevent the remaining majority of the *Vestone* battalion being cut off, and at 14:30 the *Sforzesca* Command ordered the withdraw from hills 236.7 and 209.6 and the subsequent deployment on the ridge of Stop 3, to the right of the I/54<sup>th</sup>. The *Val Chiese* battalion would hold the positions of Bolschoi.

The situation of the L/6 tanks of LXVII Bersaglieri armored battalion was quite grave: of the 14 employed with the *Vestone* battalion, 6 were inefficient (burned, 2 holes, 1 with mechanical failures, 2 had not

returned); of the 7 employed with the *Val Chiese* battalion, 2 were ineffective and the other 5 were all with jammed weapons.

The *Vestone's* withdraw, though under strong pressure from the enemy, was carried out with such regularity to allow the battalion to bring captives taken into the lines and only one of the four captured guns. The movement was completed by 20:00.

The losses found on the field were 443 alpine (4 officers) among the dead and wounded from the *Vestone*, 44 fallen (4 officers) and 146 injured (3 officers) of the *Chiese Valley*, 21 injured (1 officers) of the 54th infantry.

From the enemy, rejected the Italian attack, no initiative was taken.

On the front of the XVII German Army Corps (79th Division), the planned action of tanks had not occurred and the infantry units had returned to the bases of departure (*Document No. 86*).

Throughout the action the tactical cooperation of the XVII German Corps was lacking.

Throughout the battle, so in the XXXV Corps - CSIR, as in the II, the aeronautical units kept constantly reconnaissance, which was to be escorted by fighter units. In addition, the units often intervened in land combat, by firing on troops and columns of vehicles, or by bombing lightly on sites where Soviet troops were located.

In addition, aeronautical units provided air transport services for which carriage in an ambulance could be avoided on disadvantaged routes or a special surgery high-speed surgery could be performed in a suitable environment. In the period from 23 to 31 August, the wounded air transported were 530.

## 6. – CONSIDERATIONS

In the two Soviet official reports on World War II (9) it is said that the Soviet Command, in addition to reinforcing the units directly concerned with Stalingrad's defense, planned

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(9) IVOVSS, volume IV and IVMV, volume V.

a series of offensive on the Don and the Volga west of Stalingrad, with the aim of creating a serious threat on the left side of the attacking German units and to lighten the pressure that they were exerting eastwards.

Describing the action of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Army (which operated as seen against the Italian Army) and 21<sup>st</sup> (which co-operated with 63<sup>rd</sup> against the XVII German Corps in Serafimovic's bend), the IVOVSS continues in text: "During the protracted fights until August 30, the Soviet units forced the Don and occupied on the right bank a bridgehead which, being operationally advantageous, would later be exploited by our troops in the counter-offensive phase."

It should be pointed out that before August 20, that is to say before the battle began, the Soviets had on the right bank of Don, in the sector of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, two bridge heads which, although of a modest area, however, were such as the Red Army to avoid in a future action of having to carry out a real force of the river. They were located on the north edge of the Verhnij Mamon bend and the other on the Ogalev-Abrossimova bend. The Soviets also possessed another bridgehead just east of the mouth of the Choper in the area of the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army, at the sector limit of the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army and near the right wing of the *Sforzesca* Division.

During the battle, the Soviets widened the head of Verhnij Mamon's area to the point of reaching the top of the loop beyond the reach of Italian mid-caliber artillery, leaving Ogalev-Abrossimova intact; the bridgehead at Choper was already so strong that it was possible for him to move in the third decade of November the Soviet units that, after having battered the far right of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army, isolated from the north the German forces operating at Stalingrad.

So with the offensive against the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army in the third decade of August, the Soviets were able to achieve negligible territorial advantages, seen in the general framework of the struggle, and at a price of such major losses as the offensive capacity of at least three reinforced ternary divisions (the 197<sup>th</sup>, the 203<sup>rd</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> Guards).

The action of the Soviets can be said to be successful in the tactical field, since the expansion of the bridgehead of Verhnij Mamon and the preservation of that of Ogalev-Abrossimova allowed the Russians in the following decade to use them as launching platforms of the Armies 6<sup>th</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards in the Operation Little Saturn, which led to the defeat of the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

On the Italian side, it can not be surprising that the first Soviet attack on the *Sjorzesca* Division quickly gained ground, because the attack found only a covering veil in front of him and the opponent's initiative could secure an overwhelming local superiority in the carefully selected breakpoints.

No tactic doctrine predicts that a binary division can entrust on tasks of reissuance on a front of about 35 kilometers, with the aggravating circumstance of a flank strike and directly threatened.

Local tactical conditions aggravated the task of defense. The Don is not a difficult obstacle to forcing even in the presence of an efficient defensive line. In any case, due to the impossibility of defense to watch over it and to beat it in all its development, the limited speed of the current, the ease of hiding boats on the left bank, the river constituted for the Soviets only a logic impasse, that is, retarder of the expediency of their maneuver.

In addition, the opponent had a bridgehead on the southern shore, in contact with the wing of *Sjorzesca*, in a non-Italian area (79<sup>th</sup> German Division") against which the opponent could easily mass at the appropriate time.

The net altimetric domain of the right bank to the left could have provided a considerable advantage to the defense if the ridge lines were occupied and if a line of solid strongpoints was organized on the watershed. The Commander of the XXXV Army Corps repeatedly suggested the risk to which such an arrangement was lacking in depth and articulation, although the Army Group "B" Command - whom this deployment had imposed - would grant permission to vary it.

If the deployment of *Sjorzesca* and *Pasubio* had gravitated to the heights, the defensive battle might have been governed more firmly and more organically and it is therefore likely that its progress would have been different. By renouncing the maximum advantage, and split into small blocks and in a linear way, the Italian units remained entirely at the mercy of observing and offensive of the enemy, who, well concealed by the wide wooded area of the other shore, subtracted from any control by the Italian units and any effective reaction.

The scarcity of the forces did not allow for any solidity, and the thin veil that could be accomplished was projected all over the shore to strengthen the obstacle of the Don with fire.

Even the villages overlooking the river, exploited as tactical holds, provided more protection than defense; first because they locate and attract the shooting guns of artillery and enemy mortars, causing sensitive losses from the beginning; then because their remarkable extension facilitated the infiltration of the enemy columns by hindering defense counterattacks.

If it had been time to do so, they could gradually correct such inferiority conditions and improve, with appropriate modifications, the initial deployment. But the lively advance activity of the enemy prevented the profitable strengthening of the positions.

When, on the morning of August 20, the Soviets sprouted their attack, little more than a week had passed since the arrival of the Italian units on the Don. So little could be done, especially if one took into account the fact that the enemy exercised his harassment preferentially in the nocturnal hours, the only ones that could be exploited for the execution of fortification works. Moreover, the work tools and reinforcements needed were also missing.

The *Sforzesca*, from the very first day, was forced into intense defensive activity and therefore did not have the opportunity to focus on the local situation and on all the elements that determined it. Moreover, having recently come from the national territory, he had not yet become familiar with the characteristic operating environment of the Russian theater and the enemy's procedures. It was half made up of men from Albania and the western front and accustomed to that elbow contact that is characteristic of the trench war and to which the Italian soldier is particularly sensitive. It may therefore be that at the first revelation of the pitfalls of the new type of war, where space was a dominant element, some men were not left indifferent to the threats and offenses coming from everywhere on a 360° area.

However, it was a phenomenon of limited proportions, which did not have an appreciable extent and weight of decisive factor.

Overall, the units fought spiritually and willingly to react, and despite their numerical inferiority, they repeatedly forced the opponent to stop after getting bogged down.

When the Soviets attacked the line of Don, the Commands of the Italian units immediately faced that little of



which they could have. With a positive result on the afternoon of the 20<sup>th</sup> with poor results on the 21<sup>st</sup>, when it was for the greater number of contingents in the fight (*Document No. 87*) and the accentuated disproportion between forces, tactical imbalance could no longer be repaired.

There is nothing to complain about the use of reserves, both divisional and higher. It should be borne in mind that the situation deteriorated rapidly with unpredictable speed, that the notion of events was generally acquired late and in a confusing and contradictory way, which determined the imminence of other evolving situations, the shortage of means, the considerable distances, complications of every character and kind.

Moreover, we had to face simultaneous threats, none second at the same time, by urgency and entity; and this increases the effects of numerical inferiority. It is therefore likely that, however, it was done, the results could not have been substantially different.

Failed the attempt to restore the continuity of the front, nothing else was possible to direct the units into forced retreat towards the heads of the valleys of Kriuscia and Zuzkan and here to renew them and organize them for the final defense, waiting for the availability of new forces allowed to launch counter-offensive action.

To keep the opponent in subjection would have been essential mass intervention of aviation action that, which, on the other hand, could only assist the units on the ground in the following days and act in concert with the progressive course of resistance.

Even more serious and immediate were the consequences caused by the lack of fuel due to which he had to forgo any intention to maneuver the artillery. The same artillery in the affiliated sector, who had given and continued to give eloquent evidence of aggression and strength, were forced to rescue guns and tractors, removing them from capture after having protected their infantry to the end.

The counter-offensive action launched on 23 by the *Celere* and the right wing of the *Pasubio*, against the right side of the opponent in movement, after initial progress came across a firm resistance and finally had to stop in front of the violent reaction of the enemy.

The Italian units failed to achieve the desired results, but it should be borne in mind that at that time the enemy had now 23 battalions on the territory of the right bank of the Don and the operational efficiency of the *Celere* was no longer such as to give the fight a

decisive impulse. On it, in fact, he had the greatest burden on Krasnyj Luch's maneuver and the harsh battles had taken part in Serafimovic's bend.

Called again at a critical time for the Italian units on the Don, it did not hesitate to launch itself generously in the battle, according to the best traditions of the units that made it up, and if it could not accomplish for the first time the difficult task that it was entrusted to it, it was only due to *force majeure*.

The Soviets' behavior in this battle was no different from the one held against CSIR units in the previous twelve months of struggle. Operating in his own home, and therefore in perfect knowledge of the land and the environment, with strong numerical superiority in men, weapons and means, and by making careful use of armored units that instead lacked on the opposite front, the adversary renewed with obstinacy and fury their attacks until the total abandonment of the offensive capacity of its units.

One of the most characteristic aspects of this battle with Soviet behavior is that they open a breach in the Italian deployment between the valleys Zuzkan and Kriuscia - and therefore the owners of the spacious ridge that united the heights - did not take advantage of them, renouncing the advantages that such a situation could assure them, the Russians insisted on massing against the strongpoints of Jagodnyj and Tcebotarevskij, seeking short-range turning. But only at Tcebotarevsky, the Russians' efforts were crowned by success, to which, albeit, they coalesced factors outside the setting of the action plan. The Italian garrison, in fact, did not have enough strength to organize a defense on favorable positions outside the town. And when it was pressed and pushed to the edge of the village, dominated by the surrounding heights, nothing but tenacious wills of resistance seemed in vain.

After eliminating Tcebotarevskij's strongpoint, instead of entering into the breach and spreading, the Russians preferred to turn their attack, with increased violence, against Jagodnyj's strongpoint. But, as we have seen, this strongpoint was much stronger than the other, and the Soviets persisted stubbornly against until their impact force broke definitively. This obstinacy is explained by the importance of this position with regard to the right side of the Italian deployment, especially after the attempts at occupation had demonstrated its defensive value.

Meanwhile, the arrival at the front of the Alpine Division *Tridentina* gradually restored the balance. Despite the tensions and dangers not yet wasted on the delicate situation, the battalions in influx located neatly according to the foreseen, but the Commander of the Army and of the XXXV Corps refused to use them at once to use it instead at the time when the initiative would have passed into Italian hands. That is how it was, and the action of September 1 shows it.

In that circumstance they would gather the fruits that the wait had successfully matured, if the Command of the 79th Division had been able to give a decisive impetus to its action. Instead, the Soviets managed to maintain their superiority in the sector and to limit it so much the effectiveness of the Germanic attack to completely neutralize its effects for the sake of unitary success.

The failure to intervene in the German's armored force had a particular influence on the development of the action and led to the crisis for both Alpine battalions, which, in the general interest of the action, had daringly moved to the threshold of Kotovski.

The fact that the tactical cooperation of the XVII German Corps is completely lacking can perhaps be borne to unpredictable or unavoidable circumstances. However, that the German Command was not well-gearred to the action of its units was demonstrated by the communications it had made to the *Sforzesca* Division, which were not only inaccurate but partially unfounded. So the village of Kalmikovski was occupied at 06:30, while only at noon the Germans could take control of its eastern part. The tanks destined for the operation also did not come out of their own lines where they carried out the supply of water and fuel to move on Kotovski not before 16:00. At that time, however, the fate of the fight was already decided and for the approaching evening was necessary to give up the intent.

The engaged Italian units returned to their own lines pending decisions on the convenience of repeating the action. But this was later was definitively canceled. The obvious disproportion between the amplitude of the front assigned to the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army and the small forces at its disposal to defend the front, the delicacy of the sector and the need for it to be sustained by united forces, also turned its attention to Hitler. In fact, in the Diary of the Wehrmacht Supreme Command

(10) on August 16, 1942, it is written: "The Führer is concerned that Stalin may repeat the 1920s Russian model of attack, that is, an attack on Don roughly above Serafimovic, with direction of Rostov attack, as the Bolsheviks had undertaken in 1920 with great results against the White Army of General Wrangel. He fears that the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army, defended in this sector of the Don, can not stand for such an attack and therefore again comes to him the thought of settling the 22<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division behind the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army, in support of it".

But the 22<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division, or any fraction of it, was never placed in support of the Italian Army. It was committed to the front of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army of General Paulus did not move in that period of time except to support the German XVII Army Corps at Serafimovic (11). Only during the period of calm on the front of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, that Great Unit made a fleeting appearance in the valley of Boguciar, in the rear of the Italian Army, but to be called elsewhere a few days later.

In conclusion, even if some Italian units had to retract their defensive line in the face of the overwhelming superiority of the opponent, the situation was restored by the forces of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army only in the said precarious conditions. And it was mainly the renewed tenacity of *Sforzesca's* men, the valor of the fighters of the old *Pasubio* and the traditional impetus of the Bersaglieri and the Cavalry grouping to exhaust the aggressive push of the Soviets.

On 28 September, in the presence of Italian and German representatives, at Gorbatovo, headquarters of the *Sforzesca*, awarded at Gorbatovo to the Italian Army 40 Iron Crosses of the sector with as many Italian combatants in the battle, the General of the German Army von Tippelskirch, speaking on behalf of the Commander of the Army Group "B" said among other things: "The tenacious resistance of the Italian units engaged in the battle, and working alone, not only frustrated the enemy's intentions to break through the front but also made its immense efforts to attract more forces and to lighten the Stalingrad front by the constant German pressure. Thank you

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(10) "Kriegstagebuk der Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht - Wehrmacht-führungsstab", Bernard & Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen, Frankfurt am Main, 1965.

(11) Diary quoted: September 3, 1942.

in the name of the German Army, and all the German comrades engaged in Stalingrad, for your fighting spirit and for your tenacity."

The German General's speech contained the explicit admission that the *Sforzesca*, like all other Italian units, had done his duty and publicly portrayed the "unjustified" assessment expressed by the Army Group Command "B" in relation to of the Grand Unit of CSIR, perhaps at a time of tension caused by the tumultuous events of the battle.

## CHAPTER XIII

### OPERATIONS IN MONTH OF SEPTEMBER 1942. ALPINE ARMY CORPS INSERTION

#### 1. - SEPTEMBER MONTHLY OPERATIONS

##### A) ASSESSMENT OF THE FRONT OF THE XXXV ARMY CORPS – CSIR

Action done without success on 1 September was initiated by the Command of the Army Group "B", in order to ensure the junction between the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army and 6<sup>th</sup> German. The two Great Units had received two different tasks: the 8<sup>th</sup> static defense of Don's line, the 6<sup>th</sup> a dynamic one to push from the Don onto the Volga at Stalingrad. Therefore, even its XVII Army Corps, deployed defensively on Don, could not depart from the offensive task to the rest of the Army and, moreover, was vigorously engaged in defending the enemy's push, aiming to obtain the termination of the bases of the Don forces threatening Stalingrad.

The same XVII Corps, also agreeing with the XXXV Italian in evaluation of the importance of the hill 188.0 position to maintain contact between the two Great Units declared that they were unable to secure their possession and asked the Italian Army Forces to leave "at least one squad of the *Navara* regiment".

On the same evening of September 5<sup>th</sup>, was not only that the XVII Corps had to ask not to move the Italian garrison from the height outside its sector, but also the withdrawal of a German battalion and battery, deployed on hill 219.5 - hill 223.0, leaving a wider gap on the Italian right, thus worsening the situation of the garrison of hill 188.0 and increasing the possibility of turning east of the Bolschoi strongpoint.

That situation led to a state of greatest danger for the rear of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army; concerned about this, the Commander

of the XXXV Corps issued orders for the strengthening of Bolschoi and all the Italian line to the west to Jagodnyj, including the newly arrived alpine battalion *Verona*, among the already tried *Vestone* and *Val Chiese*, respectively to the right and to the left (*Document No 88*).

In such a situation, they could see the warning signs of the actual crisis, which became apparent during the second defensive battle of Don, which were already detectable in the disproportionate extent of the areas to be defended with respect to the small forces available.

As the idea of establishing a true junction between the two sections of the defensive line of the contiguous Great Units, and moreover, by the Italian side, had been dropped from the XVII Corps, it was not considered, at least for the moment, the possibility to retry the failed action on 1 September, from which certain tactical advantages could be derived.

On September 7, the Commander of the XXXV Corps represented to the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Armed the delicacy of the situation on the line of contact with the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, attributed to the intrinsic difficulties of the ground, to the strong presence of the enemy on hill 195.8, the lack of collaboration of the XVII Corps, the lack of means available (*Document n. 89*).

From 08:00 of September 12, the operational responsibility of the right-wing sector of the Army, between hill 228.0 and Bolschoi, 15 km long, was taken by the *Tridentina* Alpine Division, with the alpine units present in the area at that time, reinforced by the Cavalry grouping (less one artillery group) and by a L/6 tank company. Division supplemented the same day of the 12<sup>th</sup>, receiving other medium-caliber artillery reinforcements and anti-tank.

A few days before, the Commander of the XXXV Corps had expressed to the Army Command the increasingly serious state of the *Celere* Division, documenting the urgent need of a rest and reorganization, which is to be extended soon afterwards also to the *Sforzesca*, it also forced to recover the many losses suffered.

Indeed, the total combat force of the *Celere* Division (seven Bersaglieri battalions), when deducted from the various services, was reduced to just over two thousand men (1), the staff members had undergone

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(1) The 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri regiment, compared to the organic tables, had a deficiency of 38 officers and 1,000 Bersaglieri; the 6<sup>th</sup> regiment 67 official and 1,500 Bersaglieri; the XLVII battalion was reduced to 300 men. Overall, the Division needed a draft of 130 officers and 3,200 troops.

a high percentage of losses, men were in bad health (2): therefore, the Division had to be replaced, while its 120<sup>th</sup> artillery could remain in line because its men were in better shape .

The situation of the staff was similar in the Cavalry grouping and the crisis extended to horses; in each of the three regiments the losses were 100 to 200 horses, and the remaining 200 to 300 each were unusable for various causes.

On Sept. 12, *Sforzesca's* front was delimited by hill 187.1 (excluded) at Jagodnyj, extending for eight kilometers south - east near hill 228.0. To the northwest of this line the front was held by the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division, which was connected to the left with the *Pasubio* Division.

The pocket formed by the enemy offensive that began on August 20<sup>th</sup> had now been circumscribed by a line of field fortifications, made day by day with more intense general work, mostly performed at night.

A rupture operation of that line would be risky if only by Soviet units already in place. In the Italian field, however, the purpose of the September 19 operation was always alive: to return to the bank of Don.

For this purpose, the *Celere*, *Sforzesca* and *Tridentina* divisions remained in the sector, even though they were large Units not in full operational efficiency, especially the first two.

After the execution of the counter-offensive effort, the three Divisions were replaced by the 298<sup>th</sup> German Division, which was moving in the Zuzkan valley, between Blinof and Varlamof (south of Bolschoi). It would remain available to the Army Group of particular importance in the suture zone between the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR and the German XVII. At the rear of the II Corps (Poltavskaja - Radtscenskoje area) in the third

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(2) From a report by the Chief Health Officer to the Health Department of the XXXV Army Corps, it is learned that in the units 60 to 70% of the force was "strongly depleted" (90% in Bersaglieri battalions VI, XVIII and XX), 70% with diarrhea, 50% from rheumatism, 30 to 40% avitaminosis, 20% from cardiac neurosis, 100% from pediculosis, despite the preventive and repressive projections they could adopt in relation to the situation



week of September, the Army Group were always at the disposal of the 22<sup>nd</sup> German Armored Division.

The Commander of the XXXV Army Corps was aware of the Army Command which, by stationing of the 298<sup>th</sup> Division of two battalions for each of its three infantry regiments, was in a similar condition to those of an Italian Division (two Regiments with three battalions) and therefore did not have enough staff to ensure a solid occupation of the Don in a sector of such magnitude, and the weariness of the Italian divisions operating on the eastern front was generally similar to that support units of the XXXV Army Corps, except for the *Montebello* group, recently arriving from Italy, General Messe proposed, therefore, to allocate to the other divisions less widespread sectors, between the 298<sup>th</sup> (right) and *Pasubio* remained on its positions (on the left), *Tridentina* units were used. Eventually, the forces of this Division were proved exuberant to the task received, could have contributed to the re-establishment of a reserve of the Army Corps..

B) NEW RUSSIAN ENDEAVORS  
AGAINST THE II ARMY CORPS  
(11 AND 12 SEPTEMBER)

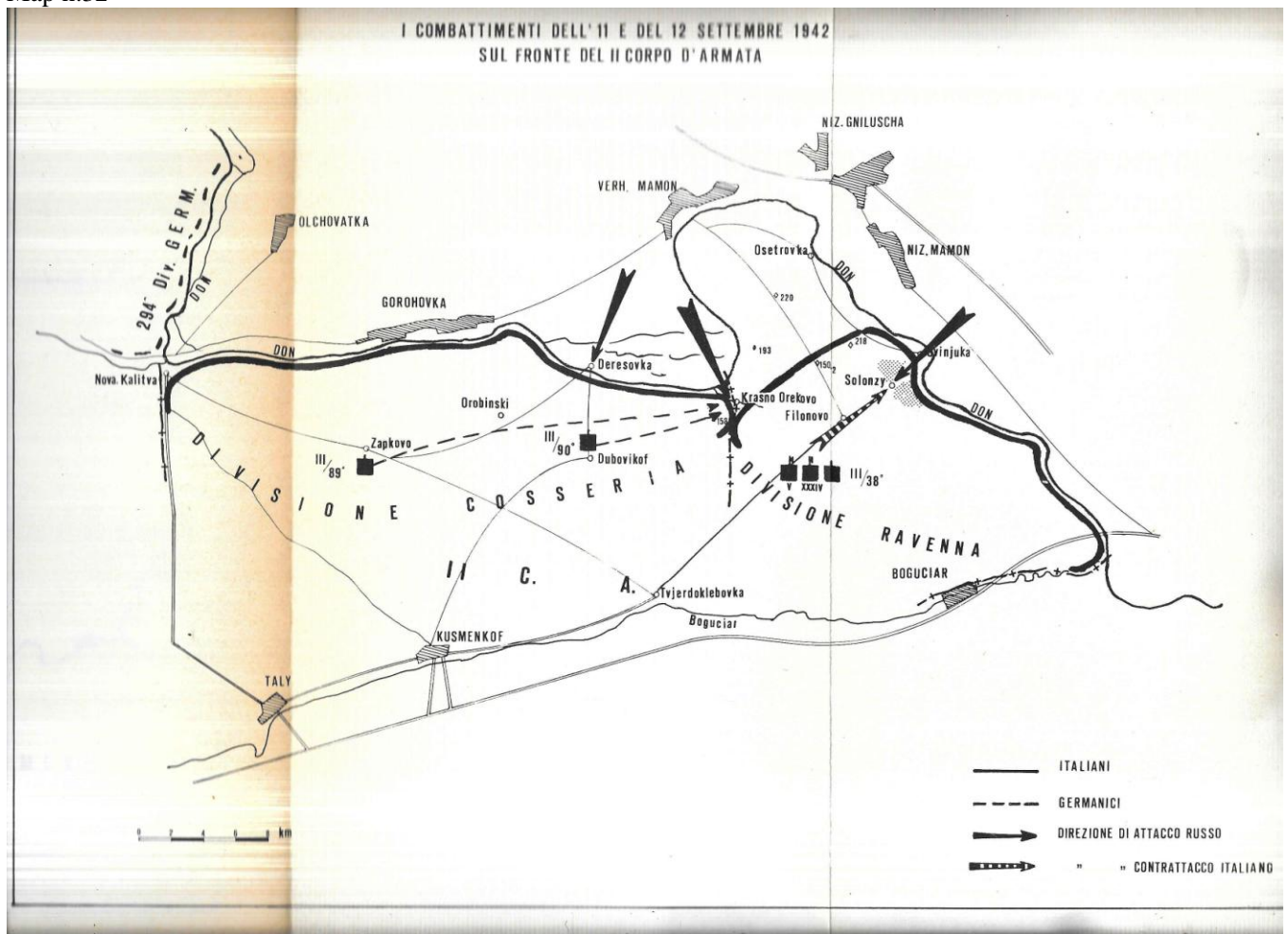
The battle that took place during the third week of August seemed to reappear on three points of the front of the II Corps on September 11 and 12, engaging: between Deresovka and hill 158.0 the *Cosseria* Division, between Krasno Orekovo and hill 218.0 the Divisions *Cosseria* and *Ravenna*, in the Svinjuka bend of the *Ravenna* Division (*Drawing No 32 and Document No 91*).

DERESOVKA – Hill 158.0 AREA.

At 05:00 of 11 September, after half an hour of artillery preparation and in favor of the fog, the enemy passed the river and began a steep penetration on the right bank along the recessed and steep gorge adorning the eastern slopes of hill 158.0, guarded by the I/90<sup>th</sup> infantry, right wing of the *Cosseria* Division.

The fire of the infantry arms and that of the artillery of the defense was rendered imprecise by the same fog that prevented the observation. At 08:00 the enemy managed to occupy the strongpoint of

Map n.32



hill 158.0, threatening the deployment zone of the most advanced batteries on the division's right.

At 07:30, according to the directives of the Command of the II Corps, I/90<sup>th</sup>, the nearby II/90<sup>th</sup> and the III/90<sup>th</sup> of the Divisional reserve had already been used.

At 08:30, the Commander of the Division, General Enrico Gazzale, ordered transfer to Dubovikof of the III/89<sup>th</sup> (already in Divisional reserve to Zapkovo) and the CV divisional mortar battalion (with the 1 company mortars and 1 company anti-tank guns of 47/32) coming from Orobinski.

At 08:40, an attack occurred at the village of Deresovka; for the intense fire of mortars and automatic weapons, advanced defense elements were forced to retreat a few hundred meters to avoid destruction.

At 09:10 the III/90<sup>th</sup> counter-attacked on hill 158.0, reached her in 09:45. At 11:00 hours the battalion's right, moving beyond the height, was heavily engaged in the movement towards Krasno Orekovo, with serious losses.

At 12:35, the Commander of the II Corps made available to the *Cosseria* the *Leonessa I* tactical group, of the Corps Reserve, located at Dubovikof.

At 12:50, while hill 158.0 and its southern slopes were back in full Italian possession, the extreme right-wing strongpoint on the west plateau of Krasno Orekovo's valley stood tenaciously.

At 14:40 the enemy tried to seize hill 158.0, but was validly opposed to artillery. The Commander of the Division called a company of the II/90<sup>th</sup> in reinforcement and a IV/108<sup>th</sup> battery in support of III/90<sup>th</sup>.

A new attempt (15:55) infiltration south of Deresovka was again rejected.

At 16:10 was advanced from Kusmenkof to Dubovikof the tactical team *Leonessa I*, again in reserve for the Army Corps.

At 18:00 the III/89<sup>th</sup> moved to counterattack to completely restore the situation on hill 158.0, but had to stop at the end of the night.

At the dawn of 12 September, the enemy made a third attempt in the south of Deresovka, rejected by the fire and by counterassault of the II/90<sup>th</sup>, which immediately restored the integrity of the line.

At 05:00 the III/89<sup>th</sup> resumed the interrupted action and at 08:00 it reached the shore of Don.

From prisoners' inquiries and rampage of the battlefield, it turned out that the enemy had carried out his attacks with the I and II battalions of the 555<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment (127<sup>th</sup> Division), reinforced by elements of the regimental accompanying weapons battalion.

#### AREA OF KRASNO OREKOVO - HILL 218.0.

At the earliest lights of 11 September, the enemy started attempts to infiltrate patrols on the front of the 37<sup>th</sup> infantry *Ravenna*, between Krasno Orekovo and hill 218.0 (the base of the Verhnij Mamon bend).

At 07:20, more powerful infantry elements advanced south of hill 193.0 engaging the entire front of the bend.

During the morning, this action became more intense and the center of fire III/37<sup>th</sup> west of hill 218.0 were surrounded. At 11:30, the company of the same battalion sent to unlock them was also surrounded.

At 12:15, the extreme right-wing of *Cosseria* and the far left of *Ravenna* were attacked, the first on the front and the flanks, the second was entirely surrounded. Hill 218.0 was also attacked.

A counterassault led by the reinforcement of the same company that garrisoned the strongpoint gained the unlock of the *Ravenna*.

At 16:30, a counterattack of the III/37<sup>th</sup> was also released by the reinforced company west of hill 218.0.

By that same evening the situation on that stretch of *Ravenna* had been restored.

At 03:00 on September 12th, the enemy again attacked *Ravenna's* left-hand strongpoint, but *Ravenna* and *Cosseria's* fire concentration in front of the junction zone between the two divisions breaking off the attempt.

The enemy's action was carried out by the Soviet 415<sup>th</sup> rifles (1<sup>st</sup> Division).

#### AREA OF THE BEND OF SVINJUKA.

At the first lights of September 11, in the defense section of the III/38<sup>th</sup>, the enemy began crossing the river with a dozen boats. Some were sunk by artillery fire while others were able to land. Another attempt was made to go further downstream to the island of Kusmenkin.

Towards 07:00, the enemy, who in the meantime had ferried other forces, taking advantage of the hedge offered by the woods and bales descending to the Don, deepened his action and at 08:00 had taken Solonzi. A counterattack of III/38<sup>th</sup>, at 09:00, did not solve the situation.

At 12:00, the Commander of the II Corps, considering the general commitment to the front of the whole *Ravenna* Division and to that of the *Cosseria* and the need to restore the line as soon as possible, made available to *Ravenna* the *Valle Scrivia* 1 Tactical Team.

At 15:00 a Soviet battalion moved to the attack of the Solonzi forest. Counterattacked by the available forces of III/38<sup>th</sup>, he retreated into the woods, reorganized and returned to the attack. The III/38<sup>th</sup> contained it, withdrawing slightly south of the town of Solonzi.

At 16:00 the Commander of the Corps also sent the *Leonessa II* tactical group, placing it at the disposal of the *Ravenna*, who moved it from Kusmenkof to the area of Solonzi.

At 06:30 on September 12<sup>th</sup> the counterattack began, to which the III/38<sup>th</sup> and the *Valle Scrivia* group participated in the first round, in the second echelon the *Leonessa II* tactical team.

Soviet units withdrew and at 08:00 the right bank of the Don was reached.

On the other side, the 412<sup>th</sup> Rifle Regiment was used (less a battalion), reinforced by the divisional school battalion and by an entire rifle Regiment of the nearby 127<sup>th</sup> Division.

The losses suffered by the units of the II Corps that were engaged in the two days of combat, including dead, wounded and missing, were 678 (39 officers). The losses of the enemy were 2,500 dead and 104 prisoners.

## 2. - MODIFIED DEPLOYMENT OF THE 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY

The front defended by the Italian divisions surrounding the bridgehead formed by the Soviet forces at the south of the Don between August 20 and 25 had stabilized and the units assigned as reinforcements could return to their parent units.

The validity of the considerations put forward by General Messe had in the meantime led the Command of the Army Group "B"

to allocate the 526<sup>th</sup> German infantry regiment (298<sup>th</sup> Division) to the XXXV Corps to strengthen with its two battalions the Italian deployment. On 23 September the German Regiment was made available to the *Tridentina* Division.

Subsequently, the Army Group "B" Command partially adhered to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command's assessments of the excessive magnitude of the sector assigned to the Grande Unit of Italy and the lack of Major Units in the second line.

In fact, it decided:

- the shortening of the Army's front for some 40 km (already occupied by the *Sforzesca* Division);
- the breakdown of the front so shortened between the four Army Corps (north to south) Alpine, II, XXXV - CSIR, XXIX German;
- the placement in the second echelon of the 294<sup>th</sup> German Division (after its online replacement by the Alpine Corps), the *Celere* and the *Sforzesca*;
- the maintenance of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division in the occupied location;
- the sending of another unspecified armored division into the Tcertkovo - Diogtevo area, to the Army Group, but directed to intervene in favor of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

Instead, it was not accepted the request to send to the second echelon the entire XXXV Corps - CSIR.

Even during the remaining weeks of September and the first week of October, the enemy, despite having ceased to undertake important operations on that front, had not ceased to activate it with frequent offensive thrusts, launched where the greater penetration in his August battle.

In particular:

- an attempt on the night of September 10, against the positions of Bolschoi, held by the *Val Chiese* Alpine Battalion;
- an action on the night on September 23, still against Bolschoi and hill 188.0 positions (*Val Chiese* battalion);
- an attack on the night on September 30 against hill 226.7 positions.

On 9 October, the *Tridentina* Division ceded its sector to the 9<sup>th</sup> Romanian Division to move about 400 kilometers, from the extreme

right wing of the Army to the extreme left wing, up to Podgorno. The Division would take the ordinary walk on foot, up to Millerovo. From this location the alpine battalions would be transported by rail to the new deployment zone; the other battalions and the baggage of the same battalions would carry out the route on foot. The Division would reunite on 30 October in Podgornoe.

The *Sforzesca*, on the same day 9, handed the sector to the 11<sup>th</sup> Romanian division and passed on to the operational dependencies of the XXIXth German Army Corps. From the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry (*Pasubio* Division), the sector between Merkulov and Vescenskaja was used to allow the *Pasubio* to be moved to the front of the Krasnohorovka-Ogalev bend. The *Sforzesca* would then be located in second row in the Meskov area when it had been replaced by another large Romanian unit. This last event had already been over on October 27, when *Sforzesca* was ordered to interrupt the winter work in the planned area and instead, they increased those on the resistance position, where it was deployed and which it would have held.

Also the *Celere*, on October 10, handed over its sector to the 11<sup>th</sup> Romanian Division to assume on 12 October the stretch between the balka Popok and Verhnij Krivskoj, replacing the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry (*Pasubio* Division) and flanking on the left the Romanian 11<sup>th</sup>. Maintained the same line up until 1 November, then relinquishing the sector to the 7<sup>th</sup> Romanian Division, to move into second row in the area of Kusmenkof - Nikolskoje - Rudjenka.

Meanwhile, on the night of October 12, the 298<sup>th</sup> German Division had entered the deployment on the Don, replacing the Torino Division in the stretch approximate between Krasnohorovka and the River Boguciar, and the *Ravenna* Division (38<sup>th</sup> Infantry) from Boguciar to Sciuravka .

The *Ravenna* had, at the same time, shifted its sector to the left, assuming the defense of the stretch between Krasno Orekovo and hill 158.0 at Deresovka, formally held by the *Cosseria* Division.

The part of the sector occupied by *Torino*, between Krasnohorovka and Paseka, was taken over by the *Pasubio* Division on the night on 24 October.

The *Torino*, which was available, had replaced the 62<sup>nd</sup> German Division in the sector between Paseka and Satubjanski on 24 October.

The 62<sup>nd</sup> had moved even further to the right, sitting between Satubjanski and Merkulov's bend, where he had been linked with the *Sforzesca*.

The new situation is represented in *Drawing no. 33*.

The need to accurately determine the topographic maps of positions, sector boundaries, targets for the fire of artillery and heavy weapons of the infantry highlighted, more than during the phases of the movement, the incompleteness of the data contained in the maps distributed to commands and units by the German authorities (3).

To somehow overcome this inconvenience, the Air Force Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army had performed a photographic mosaic survey of the Don's course throughout the Army's sector by the 71<sup>st</sup> Aerial Observation Group. The technical success of the work was excellent and had cost numerous warfare flights and some combat with the Soviet Air Force. An area of this photographic survey is contained in *Document n. 91*. It reproduces the stretch where the II Corps was deployed during the defensive battles of the Don.

The loss of possession of hill 220 in the *Ravenna* area had deprived the artillery of the possibility of maintaining an observatory on it and a reduction in the effectiveness of shots on targets not observable from the ground.

To strike the ever-active Soviet ferry that corresponds to Verhnij Mamon's bend, aviation observation co-operation was required, but this could only be granted once in mid-October.

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(3) It was, essentially, of two types:

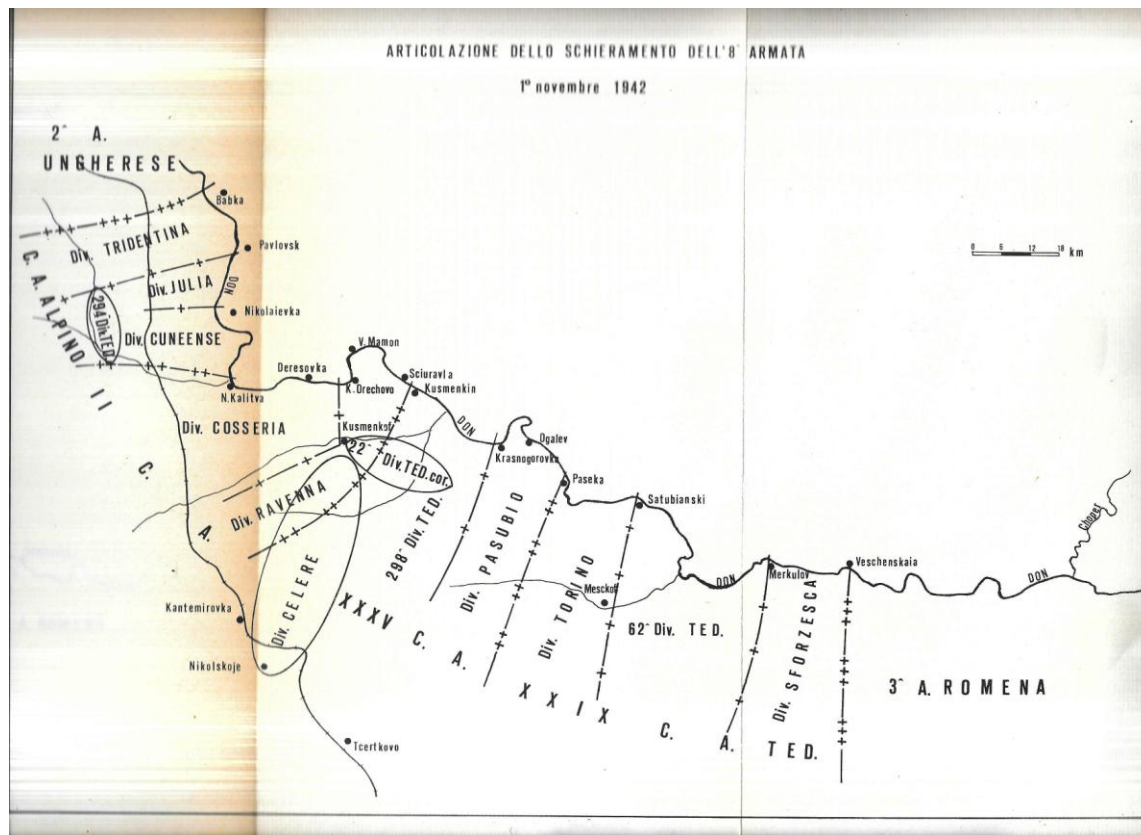
- Map 1:300,000, drawn up by the General Staff of the German Army;
- Map 1:100,000, drawn up by the General Staff of the German Army;

derived directly from Russian military maps, written in Cyrillic characters, overprinted with transliteration from Russian to German. Russian names written in German phonetics, with a great deal of consonants, became almost unreadable and imprinting for Italians who did not have any knowledge of German.

Both types of maps were too synthetic, in the representation of the ground, for Italian soldiers (accustomed to using very good maps 1: 25,000 and 1: 50,000 of the I.G.M.), Especially as far as the exact determination of the points of the defensive organization's ground was concerned.



Map n. 33



The directives from the German Command, and the same experience from the operations of Don's first defensive battle, had demonstrated how it was necessary to employ forces drawn from the second echelon of the divisions adjoining to those engaged in an attack.

Thus, there were two "intervention groups" for each division, destined to be employed outside the divisional or armed forces sector. The strength of each of them consisted of a battalion formation (one per infantry regiment) reinforced by a Corps Armor platoon, a platoon of 81 mortars, a platoon of 47/32 of Corps, one 75-inch battery, artillery and telegraphic engineers unit.

These units would be equipped with means for transport and snow removal.

The units destined to establish them were awaiting normal activities, as their meeting in the intervention group would only take place automatically if needed.

In order to reduce the time required for the meeting of the groups, wire links with the designated units, means of transport, easy-to-find meeting points, even at nighttime, daytime and nighttime exercise sessions were arranged.

The conduct of the first defensive battle of Don, which had engaged almost all of the Front of the Army and all the forces of the Army Corps, the September days on the front of the II Corps, the divisions of the Divisions from one to the another sectors, had not allowed, until autumn, that the defensive arrangement of the strongpoints took on all the development that would have been necessary.

Even at the end of October, not all the strongpoints could have been completely fenced in, and the major drawback was due not only to the lack of material supplies, but also to the difficulties and discontinuities in the supply of fuels needed for its trucking.

Army Group Command "B" had issued an order of the Supreme Command of the German Army (*Document 92*), which briefly summarizing the conduct of the summer campaign in 1942 gave guidelines for the winter 1942-1943,

In that document were stated the fundamental criteria of:

- In principle, give up on offensive operations;
- defending the line reached to the extreme;

- promptly eliminate the possible infiltrations that have occurred;
- limit the possible opening of breaches by the enemy in the assumed positions;
- continue the resistance to the bitter end "up to the liberation", by the units that had remained encircled.

Executive orders were also issued, but the whole set of orders tended to give confidence to the changes and for the timely support of the units that the operations just completed, however, authorizing to not be fully established.

### 3. – DEPLOYMENT OF THE ALPINE ARMY CORPS

The destination at the Russian Front of the Alpine Corps was established on March 2, 1942, in view of the possible participation of these operations in the offensive resumption of the summer, the German Great Units would have faced to overcome the mountain range of Caucasus, to then flow into the Middle East area.

The Army Corps Command was based in Trento and the three divisions were located in different areas of northern Italy. It supervised the preparation of the Great Units, not forgetting to illustrate the particular needs of the typical Russian environment in which they should operate.

In the succession of transport, the first was destined to the 11<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regimental Grouping of the Corps, which came to the operations area in early July. Departures of the Divisions began on July 14<sup>th</sup> and arrivals in the area went on:

- Unit of the Army Corps: July 28 - August 4, in Gorlovka;
- *Tridentina* Division: August 3 - 17, in Novo Gorlovka;
- *Cuneo* Division: August 8 - 21, in Rykovo;
- *Julia* Division: August 17 - September 2, in Gorlovka and in the Izjum area.

The initial uncertainty about the destination of Italian units had left the formulation without a precise order for the use of the Alpine Army.

On August 6, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command announced its destination to the Caucasus, according to the intentions of the Italian and German leaders, and consequently adopted command and logistic arrangements to enforce such a measure (*Document No. 93*).

Meanwhile, the German railway authorities granted a south disembarkation zone so as to minimize the discomfort of long-distance routes by ordinary means. On August 10, the entire Alpine Corps passed under to the Dependencies of Operation of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army of the German Army Group "A" and this Commander was in contact with General Gabriele Nasci, Commander of the Army Corp .

On this occasion it was arranged that German buses would carry the alpine *Tridentina*, initially started to destination, from Novo Gorlovka to Uspenskaja, 330 kilometers away. The baggage should have been doing the march, as the large German Units did not have the vehicles required for the carriage of the entire Division.

Even before the buses began to commence, on August 14, Army Group "A" Command announced that they no longer had the option of carrying it. Thus the units had to move on foot, starting on the 16<sup>th</sup>, preceded by the 5<sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment (battalions *Edolo* and *Tirano*).

On August 17, the Order of the Army Group "A" came to suspend the planned movements.

On 19 August, the same Command communicated (*Document 94*) that the Alpine Corps would come into its 8<sup>th</sup> Army, as it was said that it lacked the opportunity to carry out its rapid carriage by means provided by the Germans and the arrival in the area of employment of the entire Large Unit (the *Julia* had not yet arrived in the area of operations) would have been out of time to participate in the operations.

The *Tridentine* Division therefore, on August 21, headed to Millerovo and the *Cuneense* on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, started on Starobelsk. Meanwhile, *Julia's* arrivals continued to the railway stations in the Izjum area,

In view of the performance of Don's first defensive battle, Army Group "B" Command had on August 23<sup>rd</sup> that the Movements of the Alpine Army Corps to enter the deployment of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army were as fast as possible, bringing the daily average of

stages at a minimum of 25 kilometers and abandoned the rest days unless they were absolutely indispensable.

On 25 August, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command issued provisions for the front line deployment of the Alpine Divisions:

- The *Tridentine* Division would have been temporarily employed in the XXXV Army Corps. Alpine would have been transported off the Millerovo-Bokovskaja area by a battalion per day, while the baggage and the Alpine artillery regiment would have walked to the same destination;

- The remaining part of the Alpine Corps (*Cuneo* and *Tulia* Divisions) took position on the Don, between kolkoz Bugilovka and Novo Kalitva, replacing the 294<sup>th</sup> German Division.

Finally on August 27<sup>th</sup>, before the railroads of its units were complete, the ordinary movement started from the Izjum to the Rossosc area.

When the magnitude of the losses suffered by the battalions *Vestone* and *Val Chiese* in the fighting of Kotovski in September, and that *Tridentina* would not immediately return to the ranks of the Corps, General Nasci addressed General Gariboldi a personal letter (*Document No 95*), aimed at achieving a more organic use of alpine units and preventing their premature wear and tear, which would have adversely affected the operational capabilities of the Corps in the near future.

General Gariboldi (*Document. No. 96*) responded to him on September 6, claiming to understand the wish expressed by the Commander of the Alpine Army Corps, but that his responsibility as the Commander of the Army required him to consider other elements of judgment as well.

The deployment that the Alpine Corps would finally take on the Don was already outlined in the orders issued on September 13 (*Document 97*) by the Army Command:

- Temporary deployment of the *Cunean* and *Julia* Divisions in place of 294<sup>th</sup> German Division (The II Army Corps);
- later expansion to the north and general refinement on the defensive line, when *Tridentina* had reached the sister Divisions.

Therefore the *Julia*, between September 20 and Sept. 23, assumed the position of the 514<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Regiment (294<sup>th</sup> Division), the *Cuneense* replacing the positions of the 518<sup>th</sup> and 515<sup>th</sup> Regiments of the same division on September 25<sup>th</sup>.

The positions assumed were naturally strong, though their tactical characteristics were very different from those of the familiar Alps. However, they were stronger than any other in the Russian steppe.

The Don, impassable in that stretch, represented another element of strength, constituting an obstacle to the enemy and facilitating observation and security for defense.

The areas assigned to the first line battalions were also very wide here, with very intense focus centers, making it more difficult to control.

The field work carried out by the German units was significant, well-studied and well-maintained, easily completed by the numerically stronger alpine units, supported by the work of the prisoners of war left behind by the departing Division.

The occupation of defensive positions and the magnitude of the areas entrusted to them highlighted the scarcity of units of 81 mm. mortars and Corps machineguns, a negative characteristic of the organic constitution of the Alpine Army Corps (4). The Commander made an explicit request to the Army Commander that units with such weapons were also assigned to the Army Corps Command and Alps Divisions as well as to the other Great Units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

On October 31<sup>st</sup>, *Tridentina* Division joined the northern part of the Army Corps sector near the other two Alpine Divisions.

On November 6, the same division replaced the 23<sup>rd</sup> Hungarian Division (2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army) in the area between the Karabut and Bassovka area, for an aptitude of front of some 28 kilometers.

The Army Corps deployment were completed by mid-caliber artillery reinforcements (I group 105/32) and small caliber (3 groups of 75/27 of the horse-drawn artillery regiment, with 6 batteries) as well as by the alpine skiers battalion *Monte Cervino* and a squadron group of cavalry on foot, reinforced, of the two cavalry regiments.

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(4) See, Chapter IX.

## CHAPTER XIV

### WINTER ACCOMMODATIONS

#### I. - GERMAN AND ITALIAN GENERAL PROVISIONS

In the early days of November, the modification of the deployment of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was completed, in order to adapt it to the deliberations adopted in the winter period.

The winter soon manifested itself, preceded, first, only by night frosts, which began at the end of September. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, the first snowfall fell, not very copious, as retained by the cold already started, and carried the thermometer to the maximum temperature 0° (°C) and minimum of -7°. Already on November 9, however, the temperature dropped to -8° and -23° respectively.

The formulation of the defensive criteria and the enunciation of the operations to be carried out in order to translate them into practice had taken place at every level.

If the German Supreme Command had made known its concepts in October, on July 14, Command of the Army Group "B" had expressed its thought about the actions to be taken. The Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, in turn, had followed on 2 August.

The directives of O.K.H. (*Document 92*), after a brief summary of the achievements of the summer campaign, which had achieved "overall" the abolition of Soviet communications between central Russia and the Caucasus area, set the defensive task of the whole front, the urgency of defensive work, the search for the best possible living conditions for the soldiers, the rigidity of the defense and outlined the following executive criteria for the arrangement of the resistance line, the conduct of the operations, the use of the units, the rotation and the arrival of complements.

Commander of the Army Group "B" had spread his lesson about the concepts that should have inspired every action:

- rigid defense, projected forward, coinciding with Don's right bank, save a few authorized exceptions;
- safety against tanks, using the natural conditions of the soil, artificially accentuating them where they were less visible, creating the obstacle if they were missing;
- uninterrupted observation (also obtained with the use of artillery during the dark hours) of the left bank of the river;
- continuity of the cross-linked wire, carried in the "immediate vicinity of the shore";
- move nearer the reinforcements of the wings sectors and rapid movement of second-line units;
- strong junctions between contiguous sectors;
- organization of the defense in depth, by preparing back-ground works to protect the logistic centers, fortified from behind the lines staff, conveniently organized and trained.

At the same time, the Chief of Staff of the same Command provided interpretative and executive provisions for those of the Commander.

The experience of the previous winter campaign had shown that:

- it was not possible to reduce the forces applied to the resistance position;
- Divisional reserves had to remain in place in their assigned sector. If their location did not correspond to inhabited centers, the reserves had to be settled in underground or semi-underground shelter. In addition, it was necessary to build shelter for the reserves in their probable use areas;
- the artillery had been left in place with the men in shelter and the sheltered parts of the barracks with a frontal wall. Before it came into action, the pieces were "thawed". The ammunition was kept in niche reserves in the walkway between the workpiece and the staff recesses. They did not need to be kept in a heated environment, enough to put them in a little straw;
- for machine guns, who had kept pace with the artillery pieces; those that were brought out of heated rooms were wrapped in blankets. The slits had sliding glass. No



anti-freezing lubricant mixture, in the winter of 1941 - 1942, proved suitable;

- the continuity of the cross-link wire was achieved: first in front of the works, then around the headquarters, and finally around the rearward centers. The most suitable type was that of the "Friesian horse", which can be constructed under enemy's offense, easily transportable, adjustable and movable to avoid snow. The wire was from the fifty feet rolls (distance of hand bombs). Next to the cross-section were mined areas. Among these and the crosslinked posts (in individual holes without shelter, about two feet deep and provided with a step for the rapid exit), there were sappers with incendiary bottles and anti-tank mines;

- The best anti-tank obstacle was the rectangular triangle section with the vertical wall on the side, to harden or settled to avoid crumbling;

- the enemy had attempted numerous offensive thrusts of up to 2 to 3 battalions, he had always attached to every remarkable lowering of the temperature, he had almost made no use of skiing units.

The Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, taking into account the experiences gained in the previous campaign, had informed the directly dependent Commands on the instructions received (*Document No. 68*), confirming the defensive role of the Don line, defined by the tortuous trend of the shore, expressed by the "water defense" interdiction, which required:

- a rigid defense on the spot, with closed strongpoints and, therefore, destined to withstand even if they were surpassed, having active defense capabilities on a horizon; ..

- absence of maneuver for in-line units, as the task of the superior unit, which it would have with the "rescue units".

From these concepts and from that task, the need arises to carry out work not only for the strongpoints but also for the relief units to be placed in defensible housing, which would have been transformed into connecting elements (supports) or even in a real second position.

The rigidity of such a conceived defense gave extreme clarity to the assignment: to stand in place. It did, however, prevent

the recourse to the small maneuver, cooperation and assistance from other means where the situation of the moment suggested it. In essence, there would be an extreme division of actions between contiguous units. He also implicitly voiced the call not to recriminate the apparent disproportion between assigned deployment and available forces and the anticipation of a long service life, which would last for a few months. Therefore, the work should have responded to the initial needs of the fall season, and then to the winter, not imminent, but not remote.

In his orders, the commander of the Army to alleviate the rigidity of the provisions received by integrating them with directives and instructions to adapt them to the particular situation of Italian units: the translation of the German text was not limited to the only version in Italian but was sought to make it receptive and compatible with the Italian spirit. For this reason the variants of the "water line" were admitted (and sometimes stimulated), in order to better adapt the defensive line to the characteristics of the terrain, it was possible to cooperate maneuver between units, it was ordered the establishment of the "intervention groups" (1).

The units held at the hands of the commanders (runners, second line battalions, army reserves) should have been deployed not only to respond to an operational need based on the immediacy of the intervention but also on the convenience of restoring immediately with the Italian forces alone, a trait in front could be affected, without waiting for the Germans to take care of them. It was, in short, a point of honor for the Italians who, generally speaking, refuted the current saying of the Germans "when we [are] needed, we would come."

## 2. - EXECUTION OF THE WORK

The orders issued in this regard, in order to be actually translated into the battlefield, had to be adapted to the concrete possibilities, namely the availability of materials, man's working ability, time available.

The defensive element pushed forward was represented by *minefields*, anti-tank and anti-personnel, wherever useful but necessary

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(1) See chapter XIII.

especially in the stretches where the obstacle of the river was lacking and the lines of facilitation for the opponent. The supply of mines was largely ensured by the warehouses of the German engineers.

Then, inside the positions, *the cross-linked wire*. The availability of barbed wire rolls was poor on all the fronts, so it was not possible to obtain the continuity of the mesh before all occupied positions. The fence of the advanced strongpoints could not always be carried out with a deep band of barbed wire, but often with a single triangular hedge, easy to be interrupted by the shells of the mortars and the "catwalks." For the rearward strongpoints of the artillery and of the supplies, the only type of reticulated defense that could be achieved was the simple hedge. In order to overcome these obstacles, the fighters had devised the system of hanging on them individual hand grenades as a security device, so that, exploding for even lightly bumped, they would at least function as an alarm signal.

*The anti-tank obstacle* was represented, in many parts of the Army's front, by the very shore of the Don, heavily rocky (2). In other sections, where ground movements would have to be made to increase the steepness of the obstacle, he had lacking the availability of personnel, restrained by the operational needs of the August and September fights. In addition, it was necessary to provide daytime shifts to the many men employed during the night in patrol and wake-up services. The demands for work, the establishment of staff and staffing were paramount, and the construction of the anti-tank obstacle had been postponed, since the Germans had not met the request for the assignment of war prisoners in proportion to the work to be done. In return, the Germans suggested the use of civilian staff, but the suggestion was not accepted because, apart from any other consideration, there were no valid men present. The Major Unit Commands had, however, studied the work to be carried out, among which was the enormous importance of blocking the base of the Verhnij Mamon loop, obtained through the digging of an anti-tank trench. This would extend to the entire right wing of the *Ravenna* and to the left of the German 298<sup>th</sup>, by adapting the anti-tank obstacle to the Gruscevo balka.

The engineers - German fortification provide the technical staff for the design of the work and the conduct of the excavators, which entered

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(2) See Drawing n. 25.

in action, assisted by Italian personnel of the divisional second echelon units and the Army Reserve. The start of the work was late because, at the end of the first decade of December, the average depth of the excavation reached only thirty-five inches.

Behind the active and passive obstacles there were *the stations* of the infantry *weapons*, all dug-in. The excavation had been quite easy, because it was generally carried out in roughly mined areas. Initially, these were open positions, at best protected from weather conditions with some camouflage canvas, capable of providing shelter from night-time or some mild rainfall, not from autumn rains and totally unsuitable to defend against frost. To overcome the inconvenience, it was necessary to deepen the excavations, cover them with beams and planks that supported the beaten ground, construct wooden floors raised from the ground, provide door and window environments that would open only to allow the shooting of weapons. Those enclosed environments were equipped with stoves (or so-called "metal porcelain" or makeshift stoves) needed not only to reduce the men's discomfort or to allow them to survive, but also to avoid the freezing of the mechanisms of the arms themselves, which were not protected from frost in idle periods, would be blocked by freeze-thawed oil, albeit of the quality called "anti-freezing".

Likewise, the *shelter of personnel* not employed in the operation of arms was constructed, equipped with wooden frames in which the floors were as many places - well laid. The construction of the shelter was often done according to an industrial technique. Prepared for the excavation in the open sky, the timber cabin was assembled, pre-constructed in the carpentry workshops of the artisans, working in the back for series reproduction of ever better models. The stasis of war activity and the conduct of a mild autumn allowed the full implementation of this work program.

A *second position*, removed from the Don's course, more economical than the one on the riverbank, had been studied by the Commands, from a tactical point of view, and partially under the technical design. Some works already carried out around inhabited areas of the river would have been included in it, but lack of work had not allowed the program to be completed. The admissions for reserves that would eventually flow were just in the study phase.

### 3. - LOGISTICAL PROVISIONS

The transit of the road network of general interest was to be ensured by the Germanic authority, which was the purpose of the Todt Organization (3). Further steps had been taken by the Italian Great Units to ensure the automotive movement in their rear in case of snow. This service would have been used by the civilian population, according to customary local customs, to which the Soviet Army also resorted to, if the military units did not have enough maintenance.

As soon as the first snow fell, the problem of *winter camouflage* was posed. This could only be achieved entirely for vehicles, promptly painted with white paint.

The results were not as complete for men, as the distribution of white garments was limited, in practice only for skiing elements. In order to prevent their gray helmets, spinning from defensive works, serve as targets for the enemy's strikes, they often cover them with "makeshift" blankets, most of which are drawn from the wrappers of postal parcels coming from Italy.

With regard to camouflage and concealment, it is also worth recalling that, with the fall of snow, the slopes and the roads were equally visible from the aerial observation, since the traffic was dirty and consumed by snow and by the snow cover condition, one could judge the intensity of the movements.

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(3) See "I Servizi logistici delle Unità italiane al fronte russo", SME - HISTORICAL OFFICE, Rome, 1975.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE SECOND DEFENSIVE BATTLE OF THE DON (DECEMBER 11, 1942 - JANUARY 31, 1943)

#### 1. - GENERAL SITUATION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE WINTER 1942 – 1943

The Great Fighting Units on the Russian Front, German, and Allied had taken on the winter deployment. The operations carried out during the summer season had only partially reached the goals set by the German Supreme Command.

Indeed:

- Leningrad had not been conquered, and therefore the front of that sector could not be rectified;

- the vast Soviet salients of Velikie Luki and Suhinici had not been eliminated, since the forces devoted to the two operations could not be released, still committed to Leningrad's elimination;

- Moscow, a prestigious goal almost reached in the 1941 campaign, was no longer, at least for the time being, in the German conquest plans;

- Stalingrad remained a field of bloody struggle, divided between the two contenders, although, by the end of November, the 6<sup>th</sup> Army and unit of the 4<sup>th</sup> German Army had been isolated by the counter-offensive conducted by seven Soviet armies (of which 1 Armored) belonging to the Fronts: *South - West*, *Don* and *Stalingrad* (Battle of the Volga);

- in the Caucasus area, the Army Group “A” had captured Majkop's oil wells, reaching the northern foothills of the Caucasus, performing the mountaineering-not-operational climbing of Mount Elbrus (5,633m) and strained to deepen the advancement to the south.

But the resistance against the invaders from the Soviet armies in Stalingrad and the Caucasus had far exceeded German expectations, and had absorbed ever greater German forces, subtracted from the anticipated operations in the northern and central sectors of the vast front. Moreover, the Soviet Command, in order to bind German forces in the northern and central sectors, acted against them south of Lake Ladoga, against the Rzev salient and against the Voronez Bridge Head.

Therefore, the achievements of the Germans in the south, with the complete conquest of Ukraine and the two thrusts on the Volga and the Caucasus, could not be completed until they reached their full strategic value, for the failure to conquer all the Russian shores of Black Sea, conquering that it would have resulted in the elimination of the Soviet fleet stationed there, and the lack of penetration into the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, which would at least break the southern route of Western supplies to the Soviet Union and would also have influenced Turkey's political stance.

In the southern sector of the Black Sea and the Caucasus, however, the German Supreme Command judged that it could carry out offensive activities even during most of the winter of 1942 - 1943.

But after about a year and a half of operations against the Soviet armed forces, German units began to feel the impact of the upheld effort and the sacrifices they had sustained.

The Italian fighters in contact with Germanic elements, in fact, came to know of news from which it was possible to deduce the state of difficulty in which the Germanic Armed Forces deployed on the vast front, and which were then the ones that characterized the conditions of the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army. That is: excessive scope of the defense sectors; staggering low in depth; lack of reserves available to the Large Units; lack of supply materials; recurring crises in fuel availability and distribution.

A recent circular of the German Army's Supreme Command (O.K.H.) left a glimpse of shortage of people in the Wehrmacht, lack of ammunition and fuel, poor material welfare of the soldier, dismemberment of units under pressure of urgency to buffer flaws in the defensive lines.

With that circular was established, among other things, a special diet for the "fighter of the great battles". It was prescriptive

furthermore, to avoid dismantling of reinforcing units in other areas, explicitly acknowledging that, due to the expansion of the defense sectors and the lack of reserves, some Divisions were broken up even among five others.

2. - SPECIAL SITUATION.  
ON THE FRONT OF THE 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY  
(*Drawing No 34*)

The "Battle of Volga"(19 November) began on the ground of Serafimovic's bend, defended by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army.

After breaking the line of that front, the Command of the Army Group "B", in order to avoid the isolation of Stalingrad's forces, decided to move the German divisions in the 8<sup>th</sup> Army: the 294<sup>th</sup> into the second row , to the left wing, behind the Alpine Corps in the Rossosc area, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Armored, with about 200 armored vehicles, behind the German XXXV and German XXIX Army Corps, and even the 62<sup>nd</sup> deployed on Don between the Italian Divisions *Pasubio* and *Sforzesca*, between Satubjanski and Vescenskaja's bend. This last Division would be replaced by the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere*, who was to immediately stop the reorganization operations as soon as it started in the valley of Boguciar. The Division also consists of two non-organic Bersaglieri regiments, and with the men in the physical conditions already described, taking note of the front occupied by the three infantry regiments of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division, it was in considerably more difficult conditions than those of the replaced German Great Unit.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Army, therefore, was deprived of the second line divisions, the only forces that provided a minimum of depth to its deployment on the vast front of 270 kilometers.

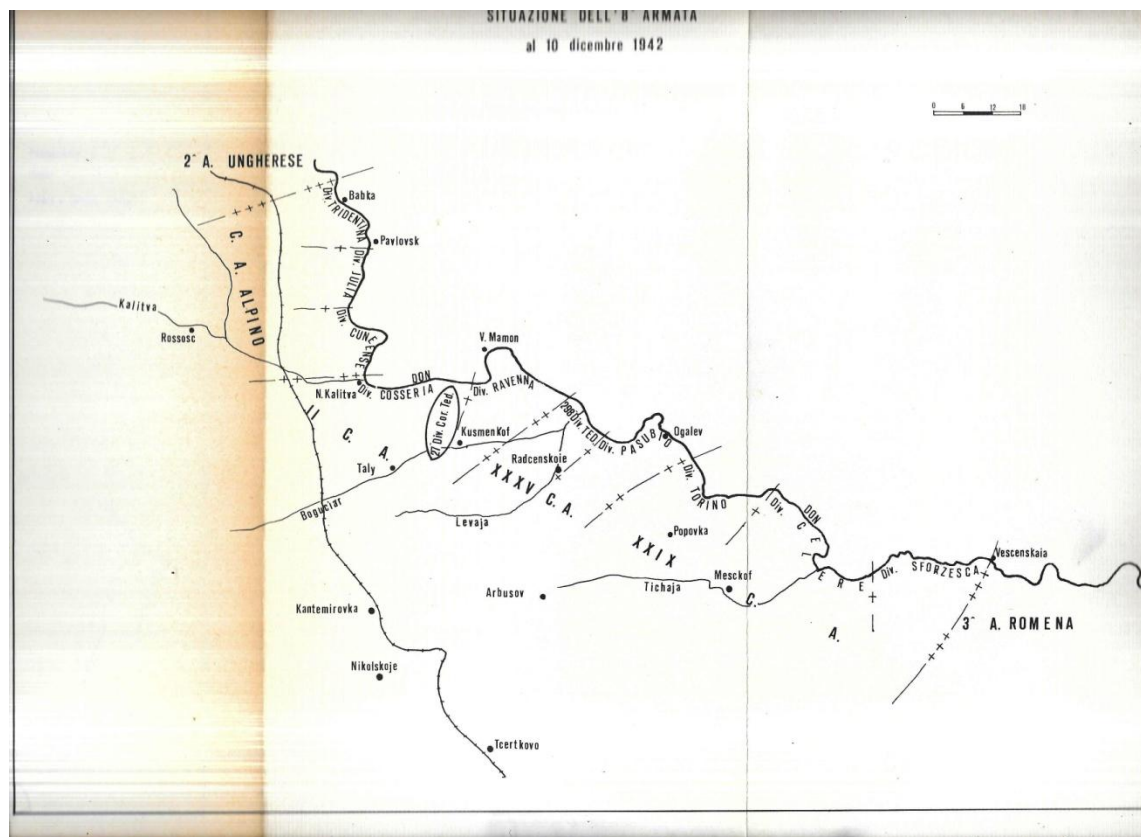
The contribution made by the 8<sup>th</sup> Army to the German Great Units involved in the "Volga Battle" was not only indirect for the departure of the three Germanic divisions but also of the direct participation of Italian units.

On the day of November 22, units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment complemented the defense of Karginskaja, blocking the highway from Bokovskaja (south-east).



# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.34



In the evening, a company of II/54<sup>th</sup> (*Sforzesca*) reinforced by anti-tank weapons, deployed at Ciukarin to block the south of the Tciornaja valley.

On the day of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, a *Sforzesca* intervention group, commanded by General Vaccaro (Command and 6<sup>th</sup> Company of the 54<sup>th</sup>, two companies of the CIV machine gun battalion of the Army Corps, two 47/32 cannon companies against, two batteries of 75/32 from the I/201) was transported to the right of the 9<sup>th</sup> Romanian division, which had to be withdrawn to the right of the Tcir, from the confluence of Tciornaja to Bokovskaja.

On November 24, the *Sforzesca* (Vaccaro) intervention group was reached by another similar (Rossi) sent by the *Celere* Division (I) to protect the right wing of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army. On that morning, the *Sforzesca* group opposed a Soviet column headed from Otbeleize to Verhnij Gruskij.

On the night of the 25<sup>th</sup>, the enemy also attacked the 7<sup>th</sup> Romanian Division (on the right of the *Sforzesca*) and while Italian artillery co-operated with its fire, forces of the 54<sup>th</sup> infantry were moved to protect the right wing divide.

On the day of the 25<sup>th</sup>, the artillery of the Vaccaro group supported a counterattack of the 62<sup>nd</sup> German Division, strongly obstructed by the obstinate hostile resistance.

On November 28, the Italian forces fell back to the previously occupied positions.

In the second half of November, as has been said, the Soviet deployment assumed an aspect, day by day, increasingly less defensive. The presence of armored units, both in the rear of the Boguciar and Pavlovsk sectors, could have cast doubt on which of the two fronts the offensive would have been.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command could only strengthen the II Army Corps with the assignment of the 201<sup>st</sup> Motorized Artillery Regiment (which operated as a cluster command) and its III Group of 75/32 Gun (assigning them both to the *Cosseria* Division). He also devoted the 101<sup>st</sup> Bridging Engineer company, which was temporarily held second echelon in the rear of the *Ravenna*,

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(1) LXVII L/6 Tank battalion, XIII semoventi group 47/32, XLVII battalion motorcyclists.

The German Command which was to strengthen the recently established Army Group Don to replenish the continuity of the line between the Don and Stalingrad was in serious hardships, and only when the danger from the Boguciar Operational Director was evident, it decided to start some reserve into the area.

On December 9th, the 318<sup>th</sup> German Grenadier Regiment (2) was inserted in the front of the *Cosseria* Division, a training unit, highly non-efficiency, which replaced the III/90<sup>th</sup>, at the right-hand side of the sector, in contact with *Ravenna*, in the Deresovka area.

From the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> came the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division of the sector of the II Army Corps, with the reserve for use by the Army Group Command. It was located in the Kusmenkof - Zapkovo - Krasni area behind a line of contact between *Cosseria* and *Ravenna*, but the strength of the entire Division did not exceed that of an armored battalion, moreover constituted by non-homogeneous means.

In addition, three German anti-tank companies were sent to the II Corps with a total of 22 pieces and were deployed in the sector of the *Ravenna* Division.

In those days, the movement of the second largest, the most threatened, sector of the 385<sup>th</sup> German Division, was shifted from the front of Voronez. This would have been discharged from the trains to Mitrofanovka railway station, in the rear of the *Cosseria*, remaining in the dependencies of use of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army. The modest potentiality of the target railway station would cause the Great Units to arrive stagger over time.

It was not foreseen, at least for the time being, for the arrival of other large German units to refine and deepen the Italian deployment threatened by the Soviet mass that increased by forces day by day. Such a mass of forces should have been opposed to a rigid resistance which, even when broken, should have remained in the surviving trunks to contain enemy penetration as long as possible. There was no possibility of defense on rearward positions, because the second position could not have been prepared and the forces had never existed to strike up at least a first defensive garrison on it.

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(2) The 318<sup>th</sup> Grenadier Regiment, commanded by Colonel Milkie, in the 1941-1942 campaign had already cooperated with the CSIR. It consisted of 3 battalions (each on 3 rifle companies and 1 accompanying weapons company), 1 regimental accompanying weapons company and 1 anti-tank company. It was all armed with 105 light machine guns and heavy machine guns, 8 heavy mortars, 6 pieces of 75 mm. and 12 of 37 mm. anti-tank.

### 3. - NEWS ON THE ENEMY

The enemy, on his part, was preparing his own winter accommodation in a manner similar to that of the Italians, obtaining materials from woods and civilian homes, and arranging even draft animals in underground shelter.

The defensive work was very important. The Soviet resistance position had a depth varying from three to six kilometers, also based on the constitution of strongpoints, sometimes linked by straight-through walkways and trenches, with multiple posts for automatic weapons and artillery.

Abundant mined fields on the paths of facilitation, especially placed on all roads and slopes, trimmed with large cross-linked wire sectional strips, arranged on multiple lines and deep from three to four meters.

Defensive works had a particular consistency on the positions of the Verhnij Mamon bend.

All that work had been carried out with the participation of full-time workers battalions, made up of men belonging to the older classes.

From many information channels (terrestrial and aerial observation, optical and acoustic detection of enemy artillery, civilian informants, prisoner and deserter interrogation), at the end of November it was supporting the offense preparation had been completed. A deserter had confirmed it, announcing as an imminent attack on Krasnohorovka - Ogalev (after December 1st), in conjunction with a large-scale action.

Frequent actions of Russian patrols were also supported by artillery fire. The consistency of these patrols had become more robust, to include units not inferior to the strength of a company. The chance of the adversary to get surprise was reduced by the presence of ice, which began to cover the river and did not allow the silent movement of the boats while still not allowing transit to even men on foot.

There was also the presence on the opposite side of multiple rocket launchers.

There continued to arrive of complements to Soviet units.

Daytime movements, seen from the ground and aircraft, were more and more intense, while the nocturnal ones escaped,

of which also had news from other sources. The increase in automobile traffic seemed excessive to the needs of existing units and, in connection with increased rail traffic, meant not only the logistics preparation of the winter season but also the collection of offensive stockpiles.

There were information about the presence of armored units in the nearby rear areas.

The artillery deployment was advanced and sophisticated.

The greater density of it coincided with the increased detection density of the Great Units Soviet.

In particular, the greater battery thickening had been reported in the areas:

- east of Gorohovka (Cosseria sector);
- counter bend of Krasno Orekovo (sector boundary between the *Cosseria* and the *Ravenna*);
- Verhnij Mamon's bend (*Ravenna* sector).

On the only front of the II Army Corps, a little more extensive than the one containing these areas, 45 batteries were detected, of which 15 were of small size, 5 of medium and 25 of unspecified gauge. Calculating that each Division had 18 organic batteries (12 of the Division's artillery regiment and 2 for each of the 3 infantry regiments), and that the first-ranked divisions on the front of that the Armor were 7, it is conclude that the revealed enemy batteries were not all present and that the information provided by the observers was pending by default.

The low activity of fire that took place until December 10 (essentially with shots) and the bad weather of the last days of that period can justify the incompleteness of the collected data.

Intercepted radio-telegraph traffic was constantly increasing.

The facility of a hospital in Nizne Mamon, a few miles from the positions held by the *Ravenna* of the same name, was a remarkable news not only on the generic aggressive intentions of the enemy, but also on the choice of its direction of attack.

Soviet aircraft travel deeply into the Italian - German rear, on commands, railway nodes, logistics centers, and was exposed by frequent bombardment actions.

Individual ammunition had been increased. The partisan action in the rear had become more intense. So much the captives taken, as well as the deserters, were rather loquacious and the assertion of their affirmations or admirations ended up positively.

Finally, another point that clarified the intentions of the entire Soviet lineage, constantly expanding, and provided guidance on the probable objectives of imminent action was the construction of passages on the Don, which had just begun as the consistency of the ice had allowed the work beginning.

On December 10 were in place (*Drawing No 35*):

- 1) footbridge south of Pavlovsk (Alpine Army Corps);
- 2) footbridge east of Kosciarni (sector of the II Army Corps - Division of *Cosseria*);
- 3) footbridge west of Samodurovka (sector of the II Army Corps - Division of *Cosseria*);
- 4) bridge between the left bank and the island of Don in front of Deresovka (sector of the II Army Corps - Division of *Cosseria*, at the border between the Divisions of *Cosseria* and *Ravenna*);
- 5) footbridge between the left bank and the island opposite Deresovka (as above);
- 6) double-transit bridge to Verhnij Mamon (sector of the II Army Corps – Division of *Ravenna*);
- 7) footbridge 1 km to the valley and village of Verhnij Mamon (as above);
- 8) footbridge to Ossetrovka town (as above);
- 9) footbridge 1 km to the valley and village of Ossetrovka (as above);
- 10) footbridge 300 meters south - east of the island of Don between Ogalev and Abrossimova (sector of the XXXV Army Corps - *Pasubio* Division).

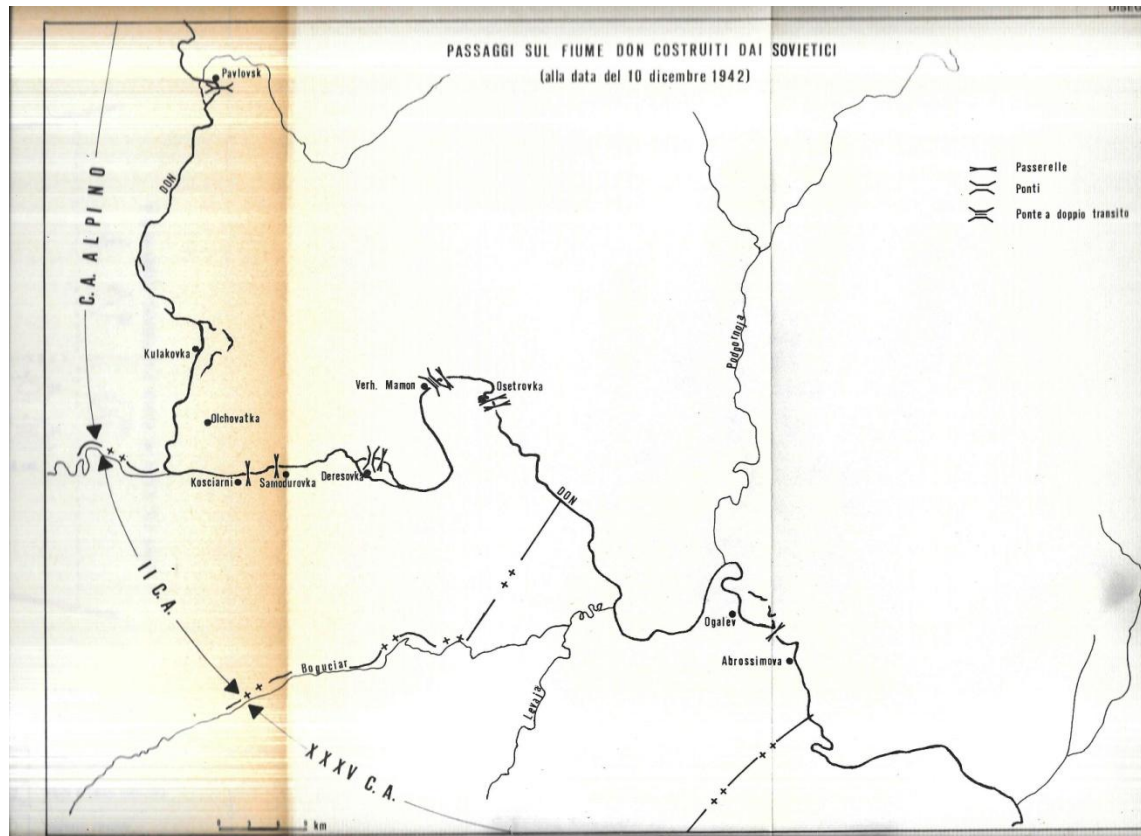
The footbridge were made of a floor of beams, soil and fascines, located directly on the ice, covered by a planks like that of a bridge.

In addition, enemy units were reported in the Gorokovka area (II Army Corps - *Cosseria* Division) and bridge materials and gratings to be thrown on the ice of the river at other front locations.

The presence of so many passages on the river, thickened to the verge of Verhnij Mamon, could not be explained solely by intention

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map 35



to better connect the Soviet units that occupied the area with those of the Left Bank. The construction of a bridge of great importance to Deresovka and another at Verhnij Mamon was the clearest confirmation of the offensive intentions to be put in place shortly.

#### 4. - THE COUNTER OPPOSING FORCES

(Drawing n. 36)

##### A) ITALIAN AND GERMAN UNITS

On the eve of December 10, just before the start of the battle, the forces in the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army were deployed on the Don in the following order (north to south):

##### ALPINE ARMY CORPS:

*Tridentina* Alpine Division, with 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiments, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Alpine Artillery Regiment;

*Julia* Alpine Division, with 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiments and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Alpine Artillery Regiment;

*Cuneense* Alpine Division, with 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Alpine Regiments and 4<sup>th</sup> Alpine Artillery Regiment.

The Alpine Corps also organically included the 11<sup>th</sup> Army Corps Artillery Regimental Group and had been assigned to reinforce the following departments:

Alpine battalion skier *Monte Cervino*;

groups of cavalry squadrons on foot of the formations of the cavalry grouping (3);  
the horse artillery regiment (4);

XXXII cannon group of 149/40 of the 9<sup>th</sup> Army Regimental artillery grouping;

XXIV canon group of 149/28 of the 9<sup>th</sup> Army Regimental artillery grouping;

612<sup>th</sup> German heavy artillery regiment, with 2 groups.

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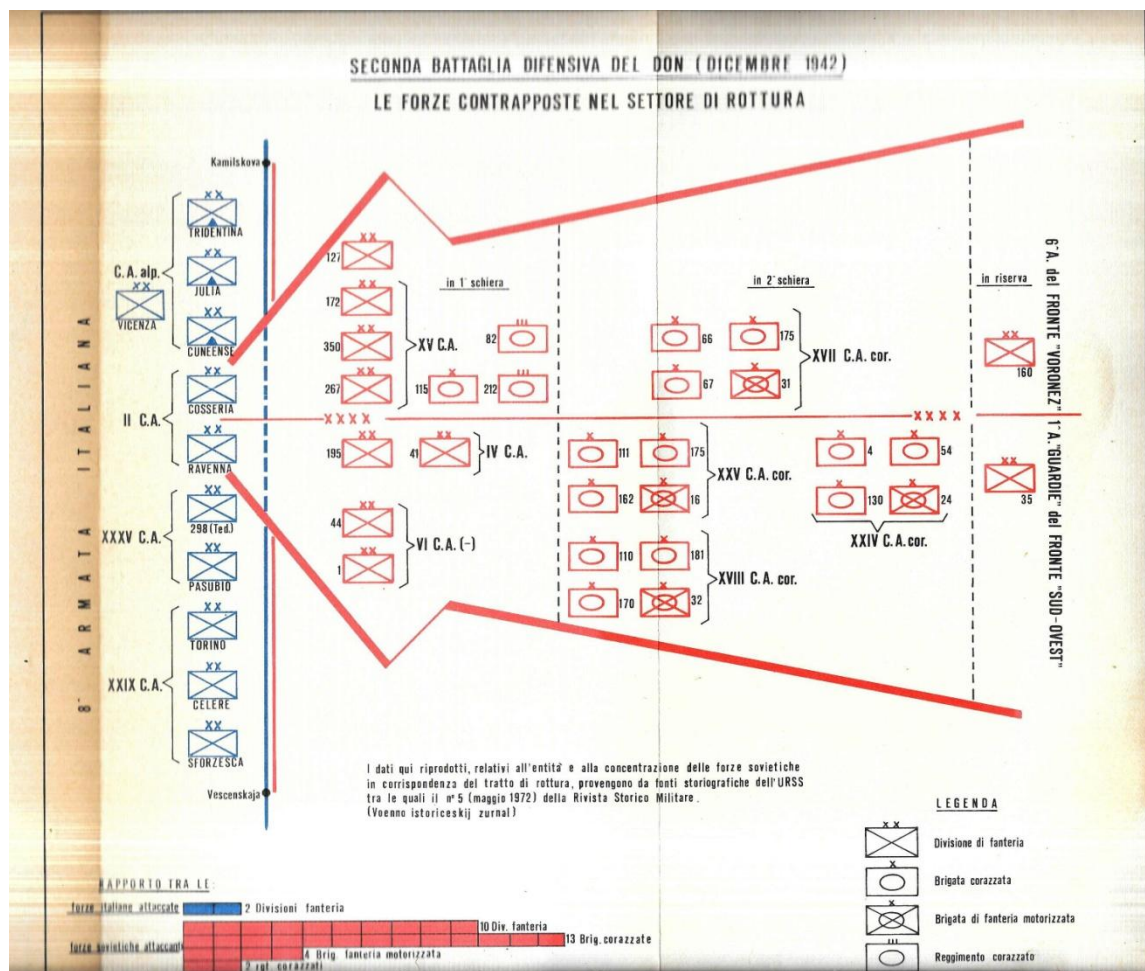
(3) The remaining force of the two cavalry regiments had been deployed in the rear for the care of the horses, which could not be used in the winter season.

(4) Also devoid of horses, located in the rear.



# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map 36



Finally, in the second row, behind the Army Corps, at the command of the Army: the *Vicenza* Infantry Division (without artillery).

In total:

26 infantry battalions;

54 batteries with 216 artillery guns; no armored vehicles.

## II ARMY CORPS:

The *Cosseria* Infantry Division, with 89<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> *Salerno* Infantry Regiments and the 108<sup>th</sup> divisional artillery regiment, reinforced by the 318<sup>th</sup> German Grenadier Regiment (3 battalions);

*Ravenna* Infantry Division, with 38<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> *Ravenna* Infantry Regiments and the 121<sup>st</sup> Divisional artillery regiment, reinforced by 3 German anti-tank Co. (22 guns in total).

The II Corps also included organically:

II Sapper Battalion;

2<sup>nd</sup> Army Corps Artillery Regimental Grouping;

CC.NN. Regimental Grouping 23 *Marzo*; and were assigned to reinforce it:

III Group of the 201<sup>st</sup> motorized artillery regiment;

XXXI Group with 149/40 cannon of the 9<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regimental Grouping of the Army;

101<sup>st</sup> Bridging Engineers company.

In total:

20 infantry battalions;

33 batteries with 132 gun artillery guns; no armored vehicles.

## XXXV ARMY CORPS - CSIR:

298<sup>th</sup> German infantry division, with regiments 525<sup>th</sup>, 526<sup>th</sup> and 527<sup>th</sup> Grenadier, 298<sup>th</sup> artillery and 298<sup>th</sup> anti-tank battalion;

The *Pasubio* Auto-transportable Division, with 79<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> *Roma* Infantry Regiments and the 8<sup>th</sup> division artillery regiment.

The XXXV Army Corps also included organically:

XV Sappers Battalion;

30<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regimental Group of the Army Corps:

CC.NN Regimental Group. 3 *Gennaio*;

and were assigned to reinforce it:

XXXIV group with 149/40 cannons of the 9<sup>th</sup> Regimental Group of the Army

L group with 149/28 cannons of the 9<sup>th</sup> Regimental Group of the Army.

In total:

20 Infantry battalions;

39 batteries with 156 artillery guns;

no armored vehicles.

#### XXIX GERMAN ARMY CORPS:

*Torino* Auto-transportable Division, with infantry regiments 81<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> *Torino* and the 52<sup>nd</sup> divisional artillery regiment;

3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division *Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta*, with Bersaglieri Regiments, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, 120<sup>th</sup> motorized artillery regiment, XLVII Bersaglieri motorcycle Battalion, LXVII Bersaglieri Armored Battalion with L/6 tanks, XIII semoventi group of 47/32, reinforced by the Croatian legion;

*Sforzesca* Infantry Division, with Infantry Regiments 53<sup>rd</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup> *Umbria* and the 17<sup>th</sup> Divisional of Artillery Regiment.

To the XXIX Army Corps was assigned as reinforcement of the LXXIII group of 210/22 guns of the 9<sup>th</sup> Regimental artillery grouping of the Army.

In total:

20 Infantry battalions;

30 batteries with 120 artillery guns;

50 armored vehicles.

Altogether, the 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY had:

- 86 Infantry battalions;
- 156 batteries with 624 artillery guns (5);
- 50 armored vehicles.

In addition, the 27<sup>th</sup> "German Armored Division, equipped with a total of 47 armored vehicles of various kinds, was operating in its sector, with reserve employment.

## B) SOVIET UNITS

On the stretch of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army assigned to the II Corps, chosen by the Soviet Command to operate the break of the Italian defenses, opposing forces belonged to two different Fronts.

In particular:

- against the sector of the *Cosseria* Division was deployed the 6<sup>th</sup> Army of the Voronez Front, with:

- first line:

- XV Army Corps (Divisions 172<sup>nd</sup>, 267<sup>th</sup> and 350<sup>th</sup>);

- 127<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division;

- CXV Armored Brigade;

- autonomous motorized rifle regiments 82<sup>nd</sup> and 212<sup>th</sup>;

- in second line (6):

- XVII Armored Corps (Armored Brigades LXVI, LXVII, CLXXV and XXXI Motorized Rifle Brigade);

- in reserve:

- 160<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division.

In total:

- 45 Rifle battalions;

- 7 motorized rifles battalions;

- 839 between artillery guns and mortar (343 artillery pieces of 76 mm and over and 496 mortars of 82 and 120 mm, with a density of 6.2 pieces per 100 meters);

- 250 tanks, of which 110 is in direct support of the infantry;

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(5) Excluding the accompanying infantry, anti-tank, mounted on armored vehicles and anti-aircraft.

(6) In Soviet military terminology called "echelon for the exploitation of success - mobile part".

- against the sector of the *Ravenna* Division there were units belonging to the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Army, the South West Front,

with:

-first line:

IV Guards Army Corps (41<sup>st</sup> Guards Division and 195<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division);

VI Guards Army Corps (44<sup>th</sup> Guards Division and 1<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division);

-in second line:

XVIII Armored Corps (Armored Brigades CX, CLXX, CLXXX and XXXII Motorized Rifle Brigade);

XXIV Armored Corps (IV Armored Guard Guards, LIV and CXXX Armored Brigade, XXIV Motorized Rifle Brigade);

XXV Armored Corps Armored (CXI, CLXII, CLXXV Armored Brigade and XVI Motorized Rifle Brigade);

- In reserve:

35<sup>th</sup> Guards Division.

In total:

45 Rifle Battalions;

18 Motorized Rifle Battalions;

1,226 between artillery and mortars (467 artillery pieces 76 mm and over and 759 mortars 82 and 120 mm, with a density of 4.2 pieces per 100 meters);

504 tanks of which 71 are in direct support to the infantry.

Overall, they operated against the Italian II Army Corps

90 Rifle Battalions;

25 motorized Rifle Battalions;

30 tank battalions with 754 wagons in total;

2,065 guns between artillery and mortar (1,255 82 and 120 mm mortars and 810 artillery pieces 76 mm and above);

300 anti-tank guns;

200 multiple rocket launchers.

In summary, against the two Italian Divisions *Cosseria* and *Ravenna* will be launched, in the succession indicated in *Drawing no. 36*, ten Rifle Divisions, thirteen Armored Brigades, four Motorized Rifle Brigades, two Autonomous Armored Regiments, with a numerical ratio of forces, compared to the opponent plotted in the table shown below. It was calculated taking into account the Soviet plan of the "Little Saturn" operation, according to which "*by creating a bold concentration of forces on the main lines, the Soviet Command was able to ensure a decisive superiority over the enemy at the breakpoints*" (7).

Two other rifle divisions (the 38<sup>th</sup> and the 153<sup>rd</sup>) and two autonomous infantry regiments (the 126<sup>th</sup> and the 141<sup>st</sup>) operated against the *Pasubio*.

In the report itself, therefore, the Soviet units listed above with the Italian units deployed on the entire front, 270 km long, defended by the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, are not compared, but are instead considered to be the only units deployed in the trajectory of expected breakthrough by the Soviets.

According to the precise orders of the Army Group Command "B", the defense had to be carried out to the bitter end *on the positions occupied*, that is to say, it was not possible to depart from such positions even for the maneuver. On the other hand, the maneuver of the forces would not have been possible, either by shifting units from one sector to another, they would come to grip entire traits of the defensive position, or because there was completely no reserve units.

In essence, the global comparison of opposing units, which involves the computation of all the forces employed in the attack and all the forces deployed to defense, does not respond to the reality of the facts when a rigid defensive organization is in the material of impossibility to resort to maneuver and motion reaction to intervene with the mass of their units in the sector on which it is gravitated and affect the main strike of the enemy.

The Soviet operation "Little Saturn" exploited the immobilism of the German - allied strategic situation of Army Group "B", following the insistent and vain German attempts to break through Stalingrad.

So, the situation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army who had all deployed in the front line, who had no reserves, and that,

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(7) Col. V. GURKIN: "Razgrom nemetsko - fascistских vojsk na Srednem Dony" (Defeat of German - Fascist Forces on the Middle Don), in *Voenno Istoricheskiy Zhurnal*, n. 5, Year 1972 (Historical - Military Magazine).

however, he had to defend the area of trust, where each division was deployed on a 30-km area, offering the Soviets the opportunity to choose anywhere in the breaking and rapid penetration area without running any dangers of the sort and also offering the absolute security that other Italian and German units dispersed over the rest of the front could not assist with the arrest action at the main offensive effort. An attack on such a precarious defense did not pose particularly arduous problems.

The numerical ratio of the opposing forces in the breaking sector is shown in the table on the next page.

The data included in the same table emphasize the strong power gap between the opposing forces and also to establish how the ability to break and penetrate the Soviet device into the Italian defensive organization, linear and thin, was, in essence, three powerful elements: absolute numerical preponderance of infantry, overwhelming armored mass, imposing fire volume (2,565 tubes between artillery, mortars, rocket launchers and anti-tank, against 354, with a ratio of almost 7.2).

The preponderance of Soviet infantry forces was considerably accentuated by the fact that they had automatic individual weapons and therefore a decisive fire mass in close combat. The PPD 1934/38, PPD 1940, PPSH 1941 automatic rifles, all of the 7.62 caliber had a 100 shots in the first minute.

In the face of this fire, the Italian units had to defend themselves with the rifle or with the 1891 model carbine (at ordinary repetition, with a 8-rounds at the first minute) as they were not equipped with automatic carbines (SMG)(8).

From the qualitative contrast of armaments to the close struggle, it is evident that the Soviet riflemen enjoyed the enormous advantage during the crucial phase of the fight, that is to say, in the assault and, in particular, as an unequal struggle they had to support the Italian infantry.

The overwhelming mass of armored vehicles was made up of:

- light T-70 tanks, with armor 35 - 40 mm;

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(8) At that time, Beretta's automatic carbine had only been distributed to some units of the Carabinieri Arm. In the 8<sup>th</sup> Army all 406 automatic carbines (SMG) were deployed.

	Soviet Armies 6 <sup>th</sup> & 1 <sup>st</sup> G(1)	II Corp Italian	Relationship between	
			Soviet	Italian
Infantry Battalions	90	20 (2)	} 5.75	} 1
Motorized Infantry Battalions	25	0		
Tank Battalions	30	2 (3)	15	1
Light tanks	352	} 47 (4)	} 15.51	} 1
Medium Tanks	382			
Heavy Tanks	20			
Artillery 75 mm and over	810	132 (5)	6.13	1
Multiple launchers	200	0	200	0
Medium and heavy mortars	1,255	108 (6)	11.6	1
Anti-Tank Guns	300	114 (7)	2.63	1

(1) The figures in this column are taken entirely from the aforementioned article published in no. 5, May 1972, of the USSR Historical - Military Magazine.

Some details:

a. infantry battalions: 9 Bn. per Division, for 10 Divisions = 90 in total;

b. motorized rifle battalions: 3 for each of the 4 Mot Rifle Brigades = 12, plus 1 bn. in each Arm. Brigade (which are 13): total 25 Mot Rifle Bn.;

c. tank battalions: according to the staff they would be 3 for each of the 13 Armored Brigades = 39, plus 1 tank bn. for each mot. Rifle Brigade (4), total 43 tank battalions.

It was, however, kept in mind that the Soviet tank units were not fully organic, so only 2 bns were considered tank for each Arm. brigade plus 1 Tank Bn. for each mot. Rifle Brigade. Therefore, the Soviet tank battalions against the 8th Italian Army in the break-through sector were:

- 2 Tk. Bn. x 13 Arm. Brigade = 26 battalion tanks

- 1 Tk. Bn. x 4 Mot. Rifle Brigade. = 4 battalion tanks

Total 30 battalion tanks.

(2) 6 of the Cosseria Division, 3 of the 318th German Grenadier Regiment, 6 of the Ravenna Division, 4 of the CC.NN group, 23 Marzo, 1 Sapper Bn of the Army Corps

(3) Since Soviet armored units had on average about 25 tanks per battalion, by analogy, the 47 tanks of the 27th German Division were assessed at 2 battalions.

(4) see previous note.

(5) *Cosseria* Division: 24 of 75/18 and 12 of 105/28; *Ravenna* Division: 24 of 75/18 and 12 of 105/28; 2<sup>nd</sup> regimental grouping of the Army Corps: 36 of 105/28 and 12 of 149/13; XXXI group of the 9<sup>th</sup> Army regimental grouping: 12 of 149/40.

(6) Italian units were armed only with 81 mm (medium) mortars. The 108 mortars deployed in the sector chosen by the Soviets for the attack belonged: 54 to the *Cosseria* and 54 to the *Ravenna*.

(7) Of which 90 of 47/32 (with limited effectiveness against medium tanks) divided: 16 of the 2 divisional A/T companies of the *Cosseria*., 6 of the 2 divisional A/T companies of the *Ravenna*, 6 of the 38<sup>th</sup> infantry accompanying company of the *Ravenna*, 16 of the 2 accompanying companies of the 23 *Marzo* grouping, 24 of the XXXII A/T Battalion of the Army Corps. The accompanying batteries for the 37<sup>th</sup> *Ravenna*, 89<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> *Salerno* infantry regiments (*Cosseria* Division) are also counted, with 12 pieces of 65/17 in total, which are not very suitable for anti-tank shooting. The two Divisions also had 1 battery (each) with 6 pieces of 75/39 (12 in total). The II Corps had received in reinforcement the III group of the 201<sup>st</sup> motorized A/T artillery regiment, with 12 pieces of 75/32.



medium T - 34 tank, with armor of 45 mm (9);

heavy KV (Klim Vorosilov) tanks, with armor of 75 mm.

Against the mass of 754 Soviet tanks (10), the invested Italian divisions could oppose, altogether, 114 anti-tank cannons, of which 90 of 47/32 (11). The effectiveness of these pieces can be demonstrated by the ammunition characteristics that at 700 meters could puncture thicknesses of just 30 to 37 mm. In addition, the 47/32 cannon was devoid of protective shields and its mobility in the combat zone was only ensured by the servicing train or carriage of arms [man handling].

The anti-tank minefields in the II Army Corps sector had an average density of a mine per linear meter in front, but their deterrent value was greatly reduced due to the mere operation of mines in the snow-covered ground.

The significant Soviet superiority in the artillery (4.1 pieces per 100 meters), used massively in the breaking sector, was multiplied by the powerful provision of fire of multiple rocket launches, weapons that did not match those of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army's armament. In the Soviet sector was about 80 multiple BM-8 and BM-13 rocket launchers (called "katjusce") and more than 100 300-mm heavy-duty rocket launchers (called "vanusci") (12).

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(9) Compared to contemporary medium tanks, it was a progress in both armor and cabinetry, and was superior not only to German Pz. Kpvk III, medium-light, but also to the more powerful German tank of that time Pz. Kpfw IV ... a characteristic that was most probably carefully studied was that of the very inclined front armor (R. M. OGORKIEWICZ: "I corazzati", Italian edition, 1964). The Soviets agree with the same opinion: "The superiority of the T - 34 tank compared to the T-III and I-IV wagons of the Hitlerian army" (*Voenna Istorickij Zurnal*, No. 2, 1974, page 46).

(10) They were normally used in the following sequence: first, heavy tanks, to neutralize the rear guard defenses and to upsets the enemy fire system; medium tanks in second row, light tanks in third.

(11) The Soviet military historian Filatov writes on the efficiency of the 47/32 cannons: "*The bullets of the Italian cannons left little blemishes on the armor, or they shivered with a hiss toward the sky*" (D.S. FILATOV: "Krah italianskogo fascizma").

(12) "*Equipped with enormous destructive power, they were employed at the main attack direction, for the neutralization of large enemy resistance centers. A salvo of the group exceeded more than three times*

In summary, there was, on the qualitative level of the essential armaments for the breakthrough (offense) and arrest (defense), a significant imbalance for the soviet, already numerically superior, in the close combat of infantry (assault and counterattack) , both in the duel between armored vehicles and anti-tank defense (deep penetration, counterbalance and counterbalance action), and in artillery fire volume (preparation and support, close and distant interception, barrage and counter battery).

The relationship of opposing forces also affected the morale of the fighters. Formulating precise indications in this regard is a very unlikely undertaking because the intimate world of every single man, his way of thinking and judging, his spiritual conditions and all the many other psychological factors of soldiers in war only reflect individual situations so different from person to person, to exclude simplistic generalizations.

The moral and psychological state of the Italian units takes on rather than generic aspirations from some of the goals given in fact:

- in his famous work of "The War," Clausewitz wrote that "*The struggle between men is based on two different elements: hostile sentiment and hostile intent.*" However, the attitude of Italian soldiers towards the Russians was never inspired by hatred. There was, therefore, no hostile sentiment. The hostile intention was obviously implied in operational plans;

- the feeling that the Italian campaign of Russia was of exclusive support to Hitler's goals became more and more rooted in the minds of Italian fighters;

- the precarious defensive organization described in the previous pages, very diluted on the front and lacking ground support, led to serious doubts about the possibilities of validating or halting the waves of infantry and Soviet armored vehicles. The collapse of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army a few weeks before it came to fruition such doubts arise;

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*of a salvo of a similar unit of "katjusce". The high explosive blows killed the staff in all campsite environments and caused not only serious damage, but also a remarkable psychological effect on the enemy" (from Voenno Istoriceskij Zurnal, No. 2, 1973, p. 67).*

- the extremely cold winter weather was a cause for concern and a worrying concern also for the inadequacy of some of the individual equipment.

Nonetheless, if it is true that the combativeness of soldiers is the most prominent element of the moral level of the units, it can be objectively considered that it does not lack to the units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, and in particular, to the divisions invested by the massive attack of the Russians.

In the Soviet field, the moral of the fighters was above all sustained and fueled by a powerful factor: the awareness of fighting for a noble and sacred end which is the defense of the homeland.

In view of the 1943-1943 winter counter-offensive, an intense activity of a psychological nature was carried out in the Red Army units, aimed at generating the indispensable aggressive spirit (after months of defensive battles and deflections) in the soldiers' souls (*Morale*).

Such an activity also aimed at raising the combat spirit of soldiers of non-Russian nationality, which represented a considerable part in Soviet units (for example, two divisions, 41<sup>st</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup>, deployed on the front of the *Ravenna* were formed by Siberians).

But at the time of the offensive against the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, the Soviet morale had been considerably strengthened, especially for the victorious events that had led the Red Army to isolate German forces in Stalingrad after the defeat suffered by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army to the right of the Italian Army.

The Information Service of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and the other Italian Great Units had regularly drawn a battlefield of the opposing force deployed on the front of the Don as the massive amount of personnel and means accumulated day after day for more than one month, had not gone unnoticed.

Data from the collection of news and their compilation, compared to those provided after the war by Soviet bibliographic sources, are almost exact for the counter-opposing forces directly opposed while they are far below the amount described by Russian historians for the forces deployed in second row and in reserve. These, in fact, were not

observable by sight, were obscured by aerial observation and unknown to prisoners and deserters, which came only from the units of the first line and not from the ones that were deeply scattered.

### C) THE SOVIETIC OPERATIONAL PLAN (13)

In December 1942, the Soviet Supreme Command had decided to beat the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army and the German Operation Group Hollidt, defending the Middle Don, while other Soviet forces eliminated the German ones enclosed in the Stalingrad pocket, moving westward 150 - 200 kilometers, the outer front of encirclement.

These tasks were entrusted to the South - West Front and to the left wing of the Voronez Front (6<sup>th</sup> Army), while the coordination of operations was ensured by Stavka's representative (14)

According to the concept of initial action (Drawing No 37), two attacks had been planned, with convergent operational guidelines on Millerovo: from the north, from the Ossetrovka bridgehead (so called by the Italians of Verhnij Mamon, and defended by the *Ravenna* Division), forces of the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Army, and from the east, from the Cerniscevskaja area, with the units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guards Army. To give security to the south side of the offensive was planned to launch an attack, with the 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Army, from the lower course of the Tcir River, on Tazinskaja.)

The operation, set for December 10, had been conventionally named "Saturn".

The Stavka strengthened the Fronts with many units drawn from its reserve. Indeed, in November - December 1942, they were assigned to the Command of the South - West Front: 1 Army level Command, 2 Mechanized Corps, 3 Armored Corps, 5 Rifle Divisions, and 6 Independent Armored Regiments. The 6<sup>th</sup> Army of the Voronez Front was reinforced with 1 Armored Corps and 3 Rifle Divisions.

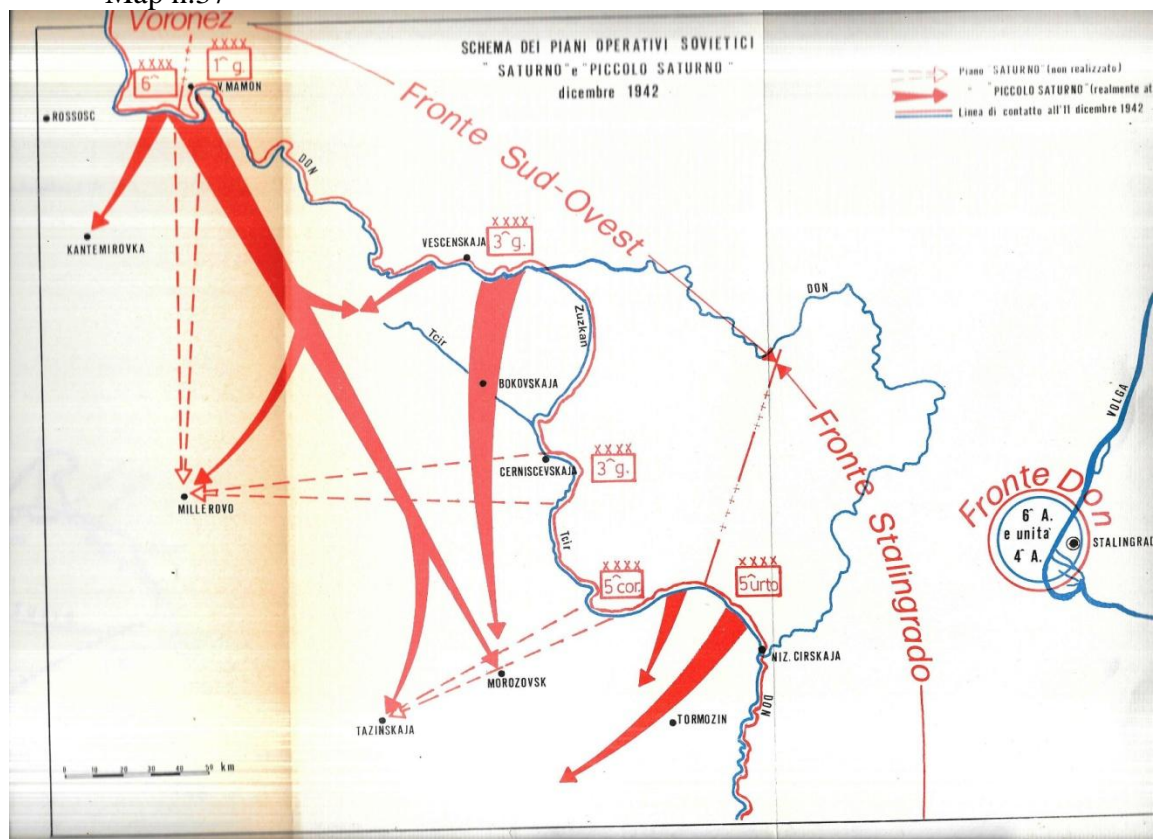
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(13) News from the Historical - Soviet Military Magazine (No. 5 of July 1972).

(14) The "Stavka", in Russian military terminology, means "Headquarters". From August 1941, the complete denomination was: "Stavka Verhovnavo Glavnogo Komandovanija", ie "General Headquarters of the Supreme Soviet Command"). Also in Russian historiography the use of the word "Stavka" implies the later.

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.37



In early December, the commands and units of the Southwest and Voronez Fronts set off the organizational phase of the operation.

By December 10, due to the reduced potential of the road network and the shortage of vehicles, the influx of forces and the preparation of the vehicles were still incomplete, and it was necessary to delay the start of the operation.

On December 12, meanwhile, massive German forces moved to the offensive, moving from the Kotelnikovskij area and pointing to Stalingrad. Superiors quantitatively, especially in tanks, broke the defenses of the 51st Army of the Stalingrad Front (already weakened in the November fights) and began to move northwards.

Taking into account the delicate situation that had arisen, Stavka decided to start the operation Saturn on 16 December, after changing the operational direction of the main offensive effort, from the planned North-South to the new North-Southeast on Morozovsk. It was intended to beat the enemy in the lower Don area, to attack his forces in the Bokovskaja-Morozovsk area and to annihilate it, thus, with simultaneous attacks from the east and northwest (see Drawing no. 37).

The 1st and 3rd Guards Army of the South-West Front were to round up and destroy respectively the Italian Armed Forces and the Hollidt Operation Group, and subsequently move to Morozovsk. The 6<sup>th</sup> Army of the Voronez Front had the task of conferring security on the offensive of the South - West Front, attacking the area of Gorohovka (defended by the *Cosseria* Division) in the direction of Kantemirovka. The 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Army, in co-operation with the 8<sup>th</sup> Army of the Stalingrad Front, had the order to eliminate the enemy located in the Nizne Cirkaskaja and Tormosin areas. Terrestrial units were supported by two Air Armies.

The complete plan of the operation was called "Little Saturn".

In this way, while in the initial plan the task of competing for the operations of the Don and Stalingrad Fronts (engaged in the Stalingrad area) was subsidiary and subordinate to the fulfillment of the main task in the final plan, elaborated taking into account the changed situation, the task of the South-West Front became a priority.

The offensive of the Soviet forces on the Middle Don had to result in the defeat of the enemy forces attempting to join with their units besieged in Stalingrad and had to

create a situation that would prevent any possibility of giving outside help to the surrounding forces.

The operation was based on the concept of obtaining a large and deep envelope of enemy forces deployed on the Don line. The realization of this concept was entrusted to the powerful formations formed on the external flanks and the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Guards Armies. The main task was assigned to the armored and mechanized Corps, which, by exploiting the success of the first-class rifle divisions, had to reach the rear of the enemy, upset the Commands and the network of connections, make a firm commitment and setting its reserves.

All the measurements associated with the preparation phase of the operation and the new deployment were conducted in compliance with the strictest secrecy. The inflow of the units into the collection bases and the occupancy of the bases of departure were only carried out during the night hours, however it does not completely escape the Italian Commands.

## 5. - THE BATTLE

In the last days of November, the Soviet Command had poured into the front of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army considerable forces, but only in the first decade of December, manifested more in its intention to develop a great offensive, the Army Group "B" Command assigned to the Army three German units: the 385<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, with a very limited consistency, and the 318<sup>th</sup> Grenadier Regiment. At the same time, it renewed the order of resisting to the end on the Don line, ensuring units, possibly isolated, which would have been "*freed from reserve intervention*", (Document No 98).

Meanwhile, the Soviets had carried out a series of local actions to distract the attention of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army from the front they had chosen for the attack.

This activity had been mainly developed against the *Pasubio*, in the bend of Krasnohorovka - Ogalev (called "the hat of the frigio") and had led the Commander of the XXXV Army Corp - CSIR to complete the deployment of that Division with infantry units and of artillery.

The attacks had been carried out, with consistency never below the battalion, on days 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9 December, especially against the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry, and were always rejected with strong loss for the attacker.

The *Pasubio* Command had carried out an offensive action, 10 December, to eliminate enemy elements in positions of the northern part of the "hat of the frigio", entrusting the execution to elements of the Army Corps reserve (XXX CC.NN. battalion reinforced, a company of the XV Sappers battalion, a recon platoon of the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry, a flamethrower platoon).

The surprise had determined the retreat of the enemy, the destruction of his field works and the capture of prisoners, but had also provoked a new attack, again rejected. The XXX CC.NN battalion had had 130 men out of combat.

#### A) THE ATTRITION PHASE (11- 15 DECEMBER)

(*Drawing No. 38*)

For the Soviets, the "Little Saturn Operation" against the Italian Armed Forces began on December 16, 1942, when all units of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army and the 1<sup>st</sup> Guard moved simultaneously to the attack of the Italian II Army Corps (Divisions *Cosseria* and *Ravenna*), after a violent preparation of artillery and mortars.

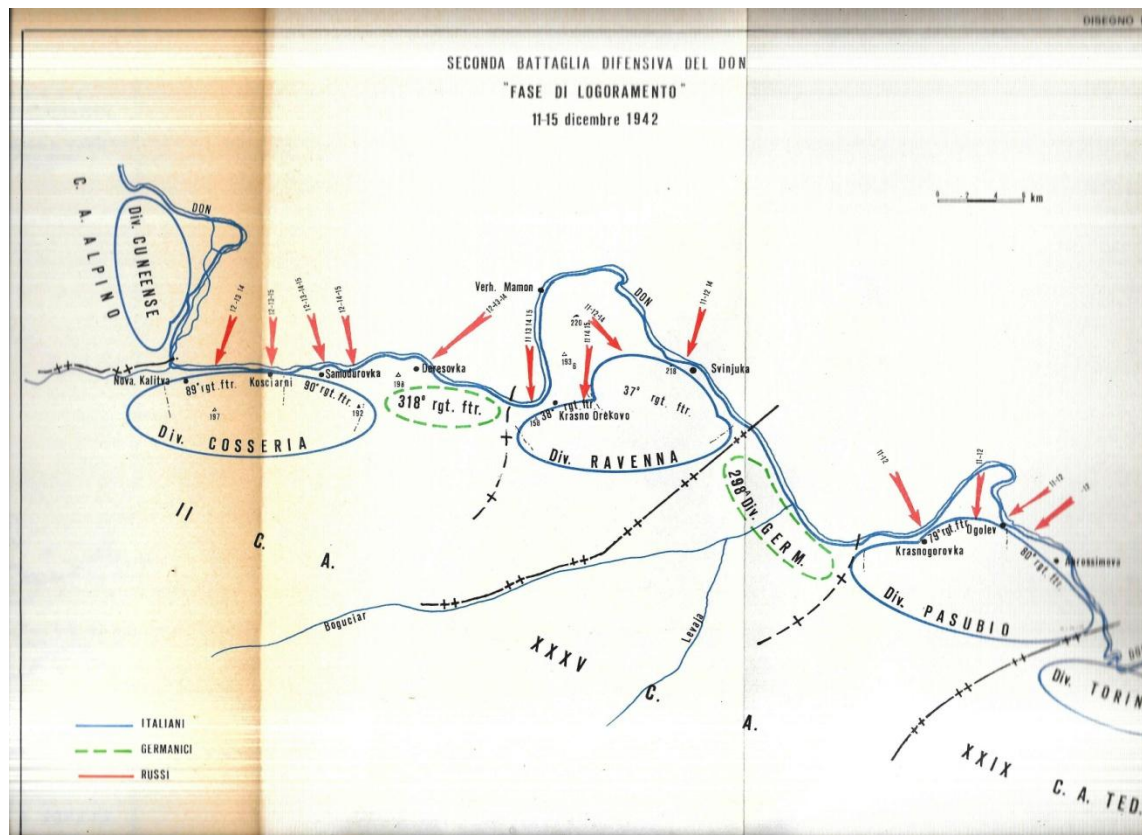
For the Italians, however, the same operation, called "Second Defensive Battle of the Don," begins on 11 December, when it is undertaken by the Russians the work of "softening" of the opposing defense forces, exercised mainly in sector they choose for breaking the line and rapid penetration in depth.

The precautionary action lasted five days, from 11 to 15 December, and was conducted by Soviet units without saving men and with significant sacrifices.

At this first stage of the battle we wanted to leave the same detailed narrative of the archive documentation, in order to make it more evident through the scarcity, but not for this ineffective language of the Diaries of the Units, the work and the torment of the attacked, committed units in an exhausting struggle, which is affecting for now, can be said of their operational efficiency and the outcome of which facilitated the subsequent attack of the enemy, spurred and carried on with the overwhelming relationship of forces described.



Map n. 38

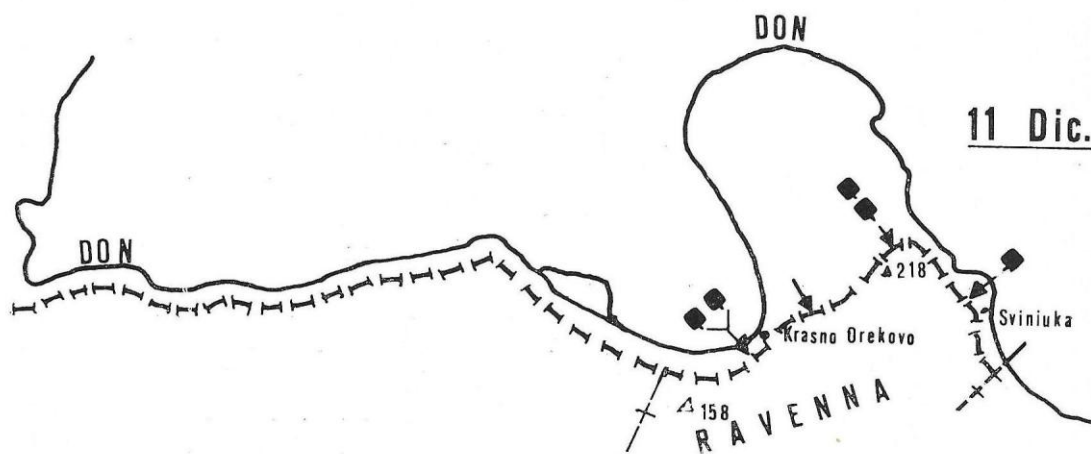


11 DECEMBER

## FRONT OF THE II ARMY CORPS.

*Ravenna Division.*

At the early lights of the morning, in a balcony descending to Don at Krasno Orekovo (west side of the Verhnij Mamon bend), a noticeable movement of enemy forces was noted, indicating the preparation of an attack. At 06:40, Soviet aviation intervened against the strongpoint of the 38<sup>th</sup> infantry located in that area, which were immediately attacked by two battalions of the 604<sup>th</sup> Rifle (195<sup>th</sup> Division) on a front of about two kilometers.



Another contemporary attack was conducted by a battalion of the 128<sup>th</sup> Rifle (44<sup>th</sup> Guards Division) against hill 218 (East Side of the bend), while a battalion of 412<sup>th</sup> rifles (1<sup>st</sup> Division) passed the Don at the Svinjuka plain.

At 08:30, at the request of the II Corps Command, a formation of eight German planes strafed and bombed the attackers, repeating the action at 10:30.

As soon as the attack on the *Ravenna* was outlined, a cautious calculation of the forces allegedly used by the enemy in the development of the action, the Commander of the II Army Corps had assessed the weight of the task to be accomplished. He therefore proposed to the Army Command that from the front of the Alpine Corps effect a lightning thrust,

which had as its starting point the area between Staro Kalitva and Novo Kalitva, to tend to the rear of Gorohovka. *Cosseria's* artillery, deployed to the north, could have provided an effective contest.

The Commander of the Army, also considering the proposal to confer a maneuver on defense, did not even take into account the consistency of opposing enemy forces (with reserves ready to hinder each enemy initiative), the unavailability of Italian units and the lack of time to organize the operation.

In the afternoon, the enemy tried to move on the town of Krasno Orekovo and continued to attack the strongpoint of hill 218.0, keeping the threat on Svinjuka's plain.

The divisional reserve of two battalions, incomplete, had been fully occupied. The Commander of the Army Corps assigned to the *Ravenna*, in temporary reinforcement, the two Tactical Groups *Valle Scrivia*, for the I were employed in the area of Krasno Orekovo, the II in the area of hill 217.6 and *Leonessa II* on Svinjuka, recommending their immediate recovery after the action.

The Army Command could not concede to the request for the forward movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, while welcoming to move east of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division into the rear of the *Cosseria* to replace the *Leonessa II* group.

The Division's losses were 50 dead (6 officers), injured 175 (11 officers), 126 missing (4 officers). The missing were considered to have likely fallen.

The losses of the enemy were huge. Russian prisoners captured by the nearby 298<sup>th</sup> German Division had revealed that some of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division's companies were reduced to a dozen men.

The *Cosseria* Division had not been directly attacked, but its artillery and mortars had given their assistance to the actions of the *Ravenna*.

#### XXXV ARMY CORPS - CSIR.

##### *Pasubio Division.*

The attacks of the 38<sup>th</sup> Guard Division resumed with two battalions at Ogalev, against the I/79<sup>th</sup>, immediately extended to the entire front of the bend, held by the same regiment. The use of the CC.NN. *Tagliamento* and the XXX battalion of the *Montebello* group determined by daylight the restoration of the situation.

The Division had received reinforcement of 10 - 75 mm German anti-tank cannons, and 1 - 88 mm anti-aircraft and two German 20-mm guns.

## DECEMBER 12

The Army Group "B" Command, probably still unconvinced that the Soviet main attack was under way in the Italian II Army Corps sector, had the inflow of the 387<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Division to the north of the sector in which the operations took place, in the triangle Podgornoe - Saguny - Gonciarovka, on the flank of the sectoral limit between the Alpine Corps and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army.

### FRONT OF THE II ARMY CORPS.

#### *Cosseria Division.*

At 06:15 the front of the Division between Novo Kalitva and Koschiarni (II/89<sup>th</sup>) was attacked by two battalions of the 127<sup>th</sup> Division, in the direction of hill 197. Two other battalions of the same Division (555<sup>th</sup> rifles) attacked between Samodurovka and Deresovka (II/90<sup>th</sup>) in the direction of hill 192. Rejected by reinforcements, persisted in action.

Against the sector entrusted to the 318<sup>th</sup> German grenadier, patrols of a company's strength were developed.

By the evening the situation had been restored, as the transfer by railway of the units of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division began, with arrival at Mitrofanovka and movement to the east of that town.

The 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division was set to advance its own deployment.

#### *Ravenna Division.*

The struggle for possession of the strongpoints of Krasno Orekovo and hill 218, lasting all night, continued intense in the early hours of the morning.

At 07:30, Soviet aircraft also intervened with strafing of the ground.

The reserves thinned. The reinforcements of the battalions of the first echelon were exhausted and were replaced by units drawn from the second echelon battalions, to which the reserves would have been replaced.

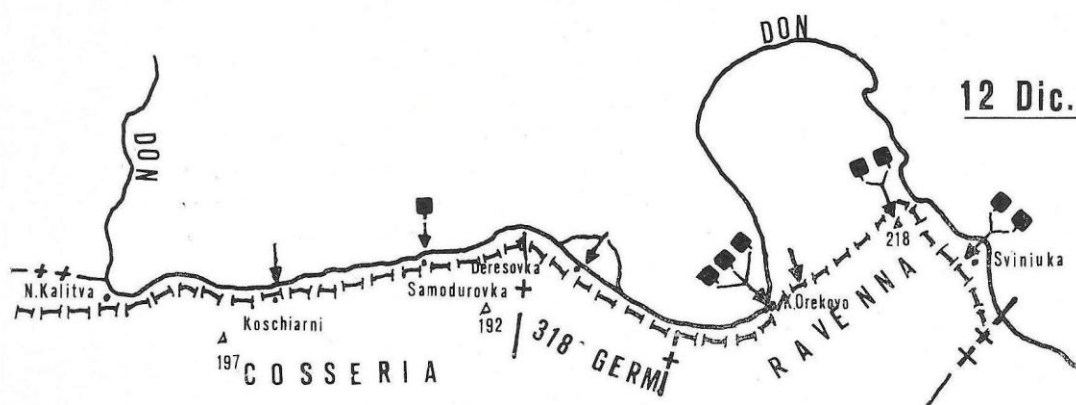
of the Army Corps, but nothing was available for the reconstitution of the latter.

In the afternoon, regained by the 38<sup>th</sup> infantry, a strongpoint at Krasno Orekovo, rejected enemy elements from the 37<sup>th</sup> in the Svinjuka plain, a new enemy action in the first location was contained by the V CC.NN. battalion.

The action of the enemy was immediately integrated and reinforced by the execution of consolidation works and the placement of numerous weapons.

New Soviet forces arrived at Verhnij Mamon and even near Don in Krasno Orekovo.

The day's losses were 502: 80 dead (5 officers), 283 wounded (14 officers), 139 missing (5 officers).



FRONTE DEL XXXV CORPO D'ARMATA - CSIR.

#### *Pasubio Division.*

The enemy's pressure in the loop of the "hat frigio" was incessant, maintained with patrol and fire actions, across the front of the 79<sup>th</sup>. All day long Soviet attacks and Italian counterattacks lasted for the whole day, performed by the *Tagliamento* group, from the VI CC.NN. battalion and two formations of company size.

The town of Ogalev was now destroyed.

During the day the intervention group of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division (LXVII armored battalion with 31 L/6 tanks,

XIII group of squadrons with 19 47/32 Semoventi, XLVII Motorcycle Battalion) and the entire XV Sappers Battalion, who joined its 3<sup>rd</sup> company already in place.

13 DECEMBER

FRONT OF THE II ARMY CORPS.

*Cosseria Division.*

During the hours of the night, the 547<sup>th</sup> Soviet Rifle attacked the II/89<sup>th</sup> at Novo Kalitva, which was supposed to be backed by the III/89<sup>th</sup>, resulting in the total use of the reserves and the second echelon. The artillery of the nearby Alpine Division of *Cuneense* also intervened.

At the same time, the attack was carried out by the 555<sup>th</sup> Rifles against the eastern part of Samodurovka, which was defended by the I/90<sup>th</sup>, contained by the forces on site

The nightly thrust of a large patrol of the 1180<sup>th</sup> Rifles (350<sup>th</sup> Division), directed against the western part of Deresovka, had also alerted the 318<sup>th</sup> German.

At 10:30 the resumption of the attack against hill 192 provoked the use of the second echelon battalion, located at Orobinski.

The aviation intervened on enemy positions, where the Soviet units were set up to continue the attack on hill 192.

The Army Command, in order to fuel the resistance, allowed the use of a battalion (III/537<sup>th</sup>) of the 385<sup>th</sup> German Division, already located in Zapkovo.

From the morning, the Commander of the II Corps asked the Commander of the Army for the situation of availability of the reserves and their probable rapid depletion. It therefore demanded the total availability of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division, which would have yielded better results than the initial use of parts.

At about 12:00, the town of Samodurovka (Sector II/90<sup>th</sup>) had practically fallen, though some fire centers were still resisting.

At dusk (16:20): at Novo Kalitva the enemy continued to exert heavy pressure while struggling abruptly around the attacked centers and in the balke; at Koschiarni, an intense patrol activity was rejected; Samodurovka's counterattack had reached the right bank of Don; from hill 192 the

Russians had been rejected beyond the river and the roundup was underway in the area.

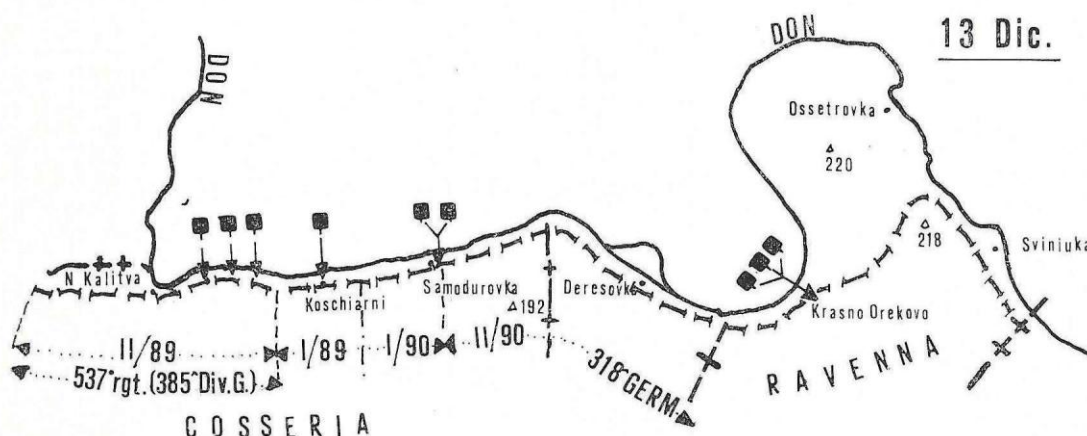
The tactical team *Leonessa I* was moving to Orobinski, while the III/90<sup>th</sup> was replacing II Bn. in the line, very tried and reduced to a few men, but a new counterattack had forced the two units to remain in place intermixed. At Deresovka the 318<sup>th</sup> had rejected an attack on the western part of the town.

At the end of the day, the 537<sup>th</sup> German Grenaders who had been placed under the dependencies of the II Corps had come into action in Novo Kalitva and had replaced the Italian forces (II and III/89<sup>th</sup>) who were already operating in the sector. Counterattack had led to the reconquest of a lost strongpoint and the unlocking of three others, still valiantly resisting. At one of them had been counted 150 Soviet dead and many weapons and ammunition had been racked up, obvious signs of the heaviest fight.

The Germans action had been effectively assisted with all the artillery in the Division.

The evidence provided by the battalions of the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry in thirty-six uninterrupted hours of struggle against constantly renewed forces had been exemplary.

Over the course of the day, the enemy had employed against the *Cosseria* from six to seven battalions.



#### *Ravenna Division.*

During the night on the 13<sup>th</sup>, the enemy had limited strength in front of the positions of the 38<sup>th</sup> infantry west of Krasno Orekovo.

The first light of the day had brought bombings from aircraft to the ridge of hill 220 and the village of Ossetrovka, both in the verge of Verhnij Mamon. The Soviet aircraft replied by establishing a permanent fighter cruise in that air space.

In order to re-establish the situation in Krasno Orekovo, where a new attack was under way at the end of the morning, the Commander of the *Ravenna* temporarily strengthened the *Valle Scrivia* II tactical group.

On the eastern side of the bend (37<sup>th</sup> infantry), the enemy combat activity marked a temporary break, but the work was intense, especially in the wooded area of the small Svinjuka bend and on the north and northwestern slopes of hill 218. Women also labored on those fieldworks, present everywhere, even in fire-stricken tracks.

Counterattack action in Krasno Orekovo area had led to the reoccupation of the two lost strongpoints and the isolation of enemy units trapped in the balke as a result of the occupation of their outlets on the Don Greto.

At the end of the day, the Army Command ordered that the Haernpel Group of the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division (16 75 mm self-propelled guns, a battalion of infantry and two heavy anti-tank companies, 600 men in total) would carry out their deployment from Peresepni to Gadjuce, to reject any actions of Soviet armored vehicles.

#### FRONT OF THE XXXV ARMY CORPS - CSIR.

##### *Pasubio Division.*

At dawn there was a group of intervention of the 298<sup>th</sup> German Division (526<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers and a group of artillery) authorized as executor of the orders of the Command of the Army Group "B" Command for the reoccupation of Ogalev. But the town had been virtually reoccupied by the *Tagliamento* group, then replaced by the XV Sappers battalion, which held the dominant positions, as the town was reduced to rubble.

The Commander in the Division keep only one infantry battalion with artillery.

The enemy, who had only worked during the daytime, was at work in the dusk, trying three simultaneous surprise attacks, was immediately crushed by the fire of the defense.



*DECEMBER 14*

FRONT OF THE II ARMY CORPS.

*Cosseria Division.*

At 08:00, there was a counterattack in the area of hill 192, using the *Leonessa II* group, but the action could not have been supported by the 27<sup>th</sup> Division's tanks, as the Army Corps command had no power to employ them.

The action was opposed by the 555<sup>th</sup> Soviet Rifles, of which the third battalion was also rushed, reinforced by the sub machine gunners company of the 747<sup>th</sup> Rifles. The counterattack resulted in the retreat of the Soviet units.

A contemporary Soviet attack pronounced against III/318<sup>th</sup>, on the western side of Deresovka, was rejected, while an intense enemy fire seemed to be a prelude to a third action in the Samodurovka area.

Before midday, the fight back on hill 192 started again, carried by two battalions of the 747<sup>th</sup> Soviet Rifles. The *Cosseria* used the *Leonessa II* tactical group, its last reserve.

At Samodurovka an action of the enemy had removed the 537<sup>th</sup> German from one of the strongpoints recovered the previous day and a counterattack was under way to get it back.

In view of the rapid wear and tear of the units of the II Army Corps, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army commanded the use of another battalion of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division, supported, if necessary, by an artillery group. The remaining forces of the German Division had to move eastward by means of transport and generous supplies provided by the Italians.

Before 13:50, hill 192 was back in Italian possession, but in front of Deresovka some fire centers of 318<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers had fallen. The regiment, which had exhausted its reinforcements, had been ordered to hold positions at any cost.

Meanwhile, despite being subjected to the repression of Italian artillery, the enemy had strengthened himself in the town of Samodurovka.

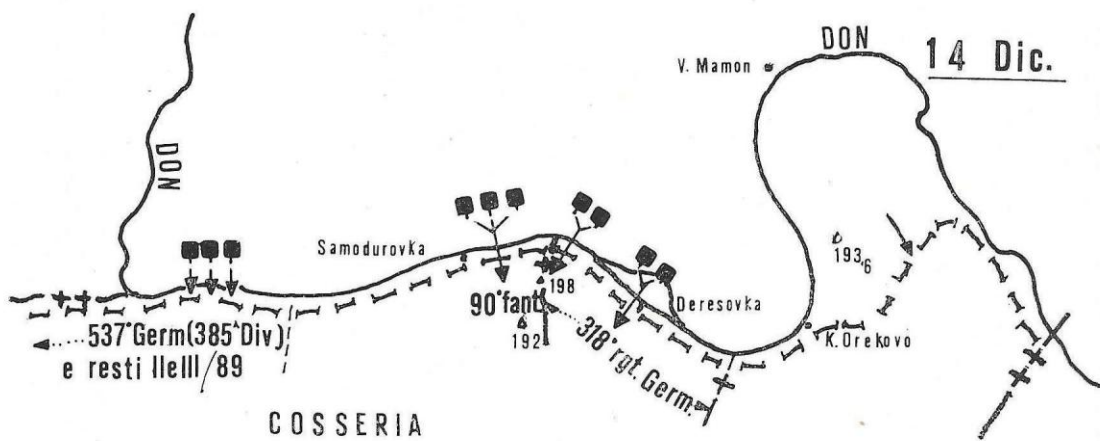
In the evening it appeared that against the *Cosseria* the Soviet Divisions 127<sup>th</sup>, 172<sup>nd</sup> and 350<sup>th</sup> had operated with no less than ten battalions, having suffered serious losses (at least two battalions on hill 192 alone). 127<sup>th</sup> Division, due to the heavy losses suffered in the attacks, had been dissolved.

The *Cosseria* reported more than a thousand of its own losses. The tactical group *Leonessa II* could not be retrieved, because it was pledged to reject the third Soviet attack on that day on hill 192, strongly pressed from north, west and east. The remains of II and III/90<sup>th</sup> continued to fight.

Both *Cosseria* infantry regiments had all their forces in the line.

The 318<sup>th</sup> grenadiers, who had to withdraw on the resistance line their own unit already in the safety zone, to keep the joint with the left of the 90<sup>th</sup> infantry at hill 192, there were no more reinforcements available.

The tactical group *Leonessa II*, after being employed in the *Ravenna* sector, was moving to Orobinski, returning to the *Cosseria*.



#### *Ravenna Division.*

There were no fights during the night. At 03:30 the presence of Soviet truck column between Verhnij Mamont and the left bank of the Don in the Krasno Orekovo valley was reported.

At 06:00 the attack on hill 218.0 was resumed.

In the afternoon (17:30), taking advantage of the partial success on the German 318<sup>th</sup>, the enemy attacked the left wing of the *Ravenna* at Krasno Orekovo, where the Division's reserves were no longer available. To compensate for this lack, the Army Corps Commander authorized the detention of the *Leonessa I* tactical team and asked the Division to use the

chemical companies and sappers, in addition to the elements behind the rear, to feed the depleted line of fire. The strongpoints had remained to the defenders, but enemy pressure was still exercised in the same area and against the west spur of hill 193,6.

At 22:00, the enemy had renewed his attack, succeeding in advancing from the west in the direction of the town of Krasno Orekovo. Collecting all the available forces, including training units, The Ravenna's infantry came back to counterattack; the enemy was forced to retreat, but not so much to abandon the overwhelming contention.

#### THE FRONT OF THE XXXV ARMY CORPS - CSIR.

##### *Pasubio Division.*

At 06:00, the front line defended by the III/79<sup>th</sup> was violently attacked, which by 08:30, well supported by artillery and mortars, had cracked the sudden adversary action.

The II/79<sup>th</sup> front also rejected the action of Soviet patrols trying to move their positions closer to the Italian ones.

Over the course of the day, the movement of numerous groups of men (10 to 15 at a time), from the north on the left bank of the Don, which was passing through the vegetation, was observed at the mouth of the great Gluboki Schlucht balka. Enemy pressure remained intense on the entire divisional sector.

A different organization of forces had been implemented, with the recovery and concentration at Getreide of the 3 *Gennaio* CC.NN battalions.

#### DECEMBER 15

Soviet attacks in the previous four days served not only to harness the defense forces, but also to gather valuable information on the most sensitive Italian section.

The actions of Soviet units had developed with greater intensity against the *Cosseria* Division, in the hill 192 area, and against the *Ravenna* in the Krasno Orekovo area.

The offensive activity against the *Pasubio* continued to have a diversionary purpose.

No other adversarial activity was carried out against Grande Units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army except the usual patrol action.

The Army Commander raised the situation to Army Group "B" Command (*Document No. 99*) so that it could be able to take timely measures by providing reinforcements to support the battle.

The Army Group Command only partially adhered to General Gariboldi's request, but imposed constraints and conditions to reduce the readiness of the assigned units (*Documents 100, 101, 102, 103 and 104*)

## THE FRONT OF THE II ARMY CORPS.

### *Cosseria Division.*

During the night, movements of Soviet vehicles and artillery transit were observed in the left bank area between Koschiarni and Novo Kalitva,

Soviet infantry forces had amassed on the north slopes of hill 192 and adjacent canyons. At dawn these units had launched a new attack. In order to be able to contain it, the *Leonessa I* tactical group had been prepared, recovered from the previous use. The enemy carried out the action with fresh forces, the entire 514<sup>th</sup> Rifle, heavily supported by artillery fire and rocket launchers. The attack, launched before the reinforcement of *Leonessa I* arrived on the spot, had obtained possession of the hill. Enemy aircraft had carried out strafing operations across the divisional sector.

In a telephone communication with the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Zanghieri noted the total depletion of divisional reserves and an almost equal situation for those of the Army Corps, while the enemy employed always renewed forces, possessing among other things intact divisions and whole armored brigades. It was now necessary to replace the units in line, physically tired of the duration of the struggle and the harshness of it, combined with the hostility of the frozen climate, while the moral strength of the men was still intact.

To grant at least a rest break would have required the assistance of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division. In addition, in order to prolong the resistance as much as possible and to have new countermeasures and forces to hold a second position, well

other units would soon be available, which at this time were not available.

The 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, despite the limited nature of its staff, could only carry out its task against other armored forces.

In this situation and with these perspectives, the Commander of the II Army Corps proposed:

- an action from the front of the *Cuneense* Alpine Division, tending to the rear of Gorohovka, which, together with the woods in front of Deresovka, constituted "driving force for the enemy";

- the replacement of the Italian and German units (537<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers) who fought in the I/89<sup>th</sup> sector, with two alpine battalions, to recover those units;

- the assignment of some alpine battalions to be located in second tier behind the *Cosseria* Divisions (at Orobinski or Dubovikof) and *Ravenna* (at Filonovo or Gadjucce) as contingency reserves when the enemy's decisive attack had come.

They should have been located, that is, in each divisional sector two or three battalions. However, if the proposal for online replacement of a part of the *Cosseria* had been accepted, the battalions of the *Ravenna* would have sufficed.

It was, in essence, a series of proposals whose validity was to find a concrete demonstration a few days later, when it had to be urgently transferred to the front of the II Corps, dented by the enemy, the entire *Julia* Alpine Division.

The proposals were not accepted.

A renewed counterattack of the *Cosseria* on hill 192, at 11:30, encountered very strong resistance and the losses were serious for both sides.

Meanwhile it was decided to transfer the German anti-tank group B, with 22 guns, from the Alpine Corps to the *Cosseria* sector. At the end of the morning, the far right wing of the 318<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers had been slightly retarded to avoid circumvention by the forces of the 195<sup>th</sup> Soviet Division operating against the 38<sup>th</sup> infantry at hill 158.

The use of the forces of the 385<sup>th</sup> German in support of the *Cosseria* was so well-advised that at 14:30 the German liaison officer communicated to the Command of the II Corps that was made available to the *Cosseria* Division

also the battalion of 539<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers located at Orobinski, for the reconquest of hill 192 and to reach the line of resistance north of it. The Command of the same regiment with another battalion would move from Zapkovo to Orobinski, resting, however, at the Command of the Army Group "B", together with a company of tank-destroyers, armed with 10 pieces of 105.

Consumption of ammunition of all weapons was fierce, and the ammunition of the II Corps was difficult to meet.

Late evening (20:00):

- in the area of Samodurovka the enemy pressure was accentuated;
- The Command of *Cosseria* informed that for the counterattack of the next day, the German battalion of the 539<sup>th</sup> would have passed on to the dependency of the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored.

Meanwhile, around hill 192 the fight continued, albeit heavily worn out, the II and III/90<sup>th</sup> and the three battalions of the *Leonessa* group. In the Deresovka area a limited activity was carried out to reinforce junction between the I/90<sup>th</sup> and hill 192 zone the online reserve units from the rear were sent.

At 20:15, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army issued the instructions received from the Command of the Army Group "B":

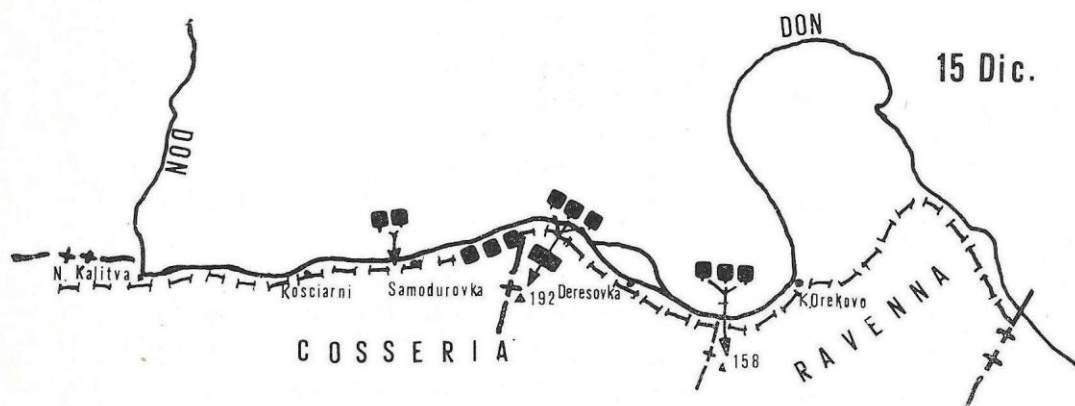
- 385<sup>th</sup> Division, with all units in the area (the 538<sup>th</sup> regiment not yet joined was replaced by the 14<sup>th</sup> German police regiment on arrival) was transferred to the II Corps to restore the situation in the *Cosseria* sector;

- The *Cosseria* Division, which was to be replaced in the night by the 385<sup>th</sup>, would have retrieved the infantry regiments (including the accompanying batteries), but would leave the divisional and reinforcement artillery in place. Italian unit would have retired as soon as they received the replacement;

- the responsibility of the entire *Cosseria* sector would pass to the Commander of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division, extending also to the 318<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers and to the anti-tank group B;

- The *Cosseria* Command would have assembled and rearranged its infantry units in the second line, pending new orders.

It was the Commander of the II Corps that the Infantry of *Cosseria*, just replaced, went to support the *Ravenna*.



#### *Ravenna Division.*

At 03:30 a strongpoint of the 38<sup>th</sup> infantry west of hill 158 was surrounded and divided by the infiltration of the enemy among his fire centers; therefore the junction to the left, with the 318<sup>th</sup> German Grenadier (*Cosseria* Division), was compromised. To overcome that threat it was no longer possible to use offensive units at the battalion level. It was only a back-up company for support, along with other elements drawn from the rear, which did not know each other and lacked the specific combat training and practice acquired by the infantry of the battalions.

However, night action, albeit with limited means, had achieved the result of demolishing the attacker, who left the dead, wounded and arms, and captured prisoners.

Examination of documents found on the body of a Soviet officer dropped in the night combat allowed the enemy to follow two directions of attack; the first from Deresovka (the left margin of the *Ravenna* sector) and the second from Krasno Orekovo, both for the goal of Tvjerdoklebovka (Boguciar valley).

Rejected in the night from hill 158, the opponent renewed his action from the north on Krasno Orekovo with the 122<sup>nd</sup> Guard's Rifle,

to cut off the salients that came to the Don north of the town. He had also taken action on hill 158, where the 318<sup>th</sup> German Grenadier was little able to contribute to the maintenance of the junction.

Meanwhile, *Ravenna* was in the area of Krasno Orekovo the few forces available.

Towards the end of the morning, the XLVII Motorcycle Battalion was sent to Gadjucce, the first to reach the *Celere* intervention group, moved by the *Pasubio* sector.

Weather conditions throughout the morning had made it impossible for any type of aircraft to operate.

In the evening, the 573<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Regiment, after occupying the night in the strongpoint of the left wing of the sector, having reached and crossing the valley to the limit with the 318<sup>th</sup> Grenadier, was attacking the other side of the left wing of the 38<sup>th</sup> infantry.

Numerous forces shifts had been made to deal with the threatening situation; the II/37<sup>th</sup> had given up a reinforced company (to constitute a reinforcement to the 38<sup>th</sup>) replaced by the 1<sup>st</sup> company of the IV Engineer battalion, dealing with the rear, the line was also called on the divisional company, the 2<sup>nd</sup>/II Sappers and the 2nd Chemical Company of the Army Corps.

But at 23:00 the enemy was able to overcome the strongpoint that still secured the *Cosseria* and widened the position, pushing forward new forces. With the use of units made to flow over the line, the strongpoint was unlocked and the connection to the left was restored with the 318<sup>th</sup> German, along the hill 158 track in Deresovka. The other strongpoints along the river had continued their resistance.

#### FRONT OF THE XXXV ARMY CORPS - CSIR.

##### *Pasubio* Division.

For the whole day, the enemy activity on the front of the Division was limited to the action of strong patrols and the continuation of field work.

Prisoners captured admitted that in those days the attacking units had suffered heavy losses, for a total of a few thousand men.

The *Celere* intervention group left the sector because it was destined to that of the II Army Corps.



After five days of continuous, and often harsh, combat, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Forces had essentially maintained their positions.

The generous tenacity of the infantry, the intense and quick action of the artillery, the effective operation of the air arm - when the weather conditions had allowed it - had managed to contain the impetus of the enemy, which had profound losses in men and means.

The assault waves had, in some cases even in closed order, been under the focus of automatic defense weapons. The blood was flowing - literally - until it reddened the iced Don under hill 218 (north of Svinjuka). From the Russians speakers (in Italian) had threatened retaliation for the huge losses suffered. The bodies of the fallen had collapsed under Italian positions, blocking the weapons shooting sector.

Meanwhile, the deployment for the attack was completing on the opposite shore of Don.

The Commander of the Army could express to the fighters his praise:

*"Good for the II Army Corps.*

*"For five days you have been fighting hard and you have gloriously made your motto" Do not pass ". Bravo! I'm proud of you.*

*"You must insist with tenacity, with unshakable faith, and you will win by gaining the admiration and gratitude of our country.*

Gariboldi".

The main aim pursued by the Russians this first phase of the battle, namely to wear away the defense forces to find them less efficient at the next stage of the offensive, had been achieved.

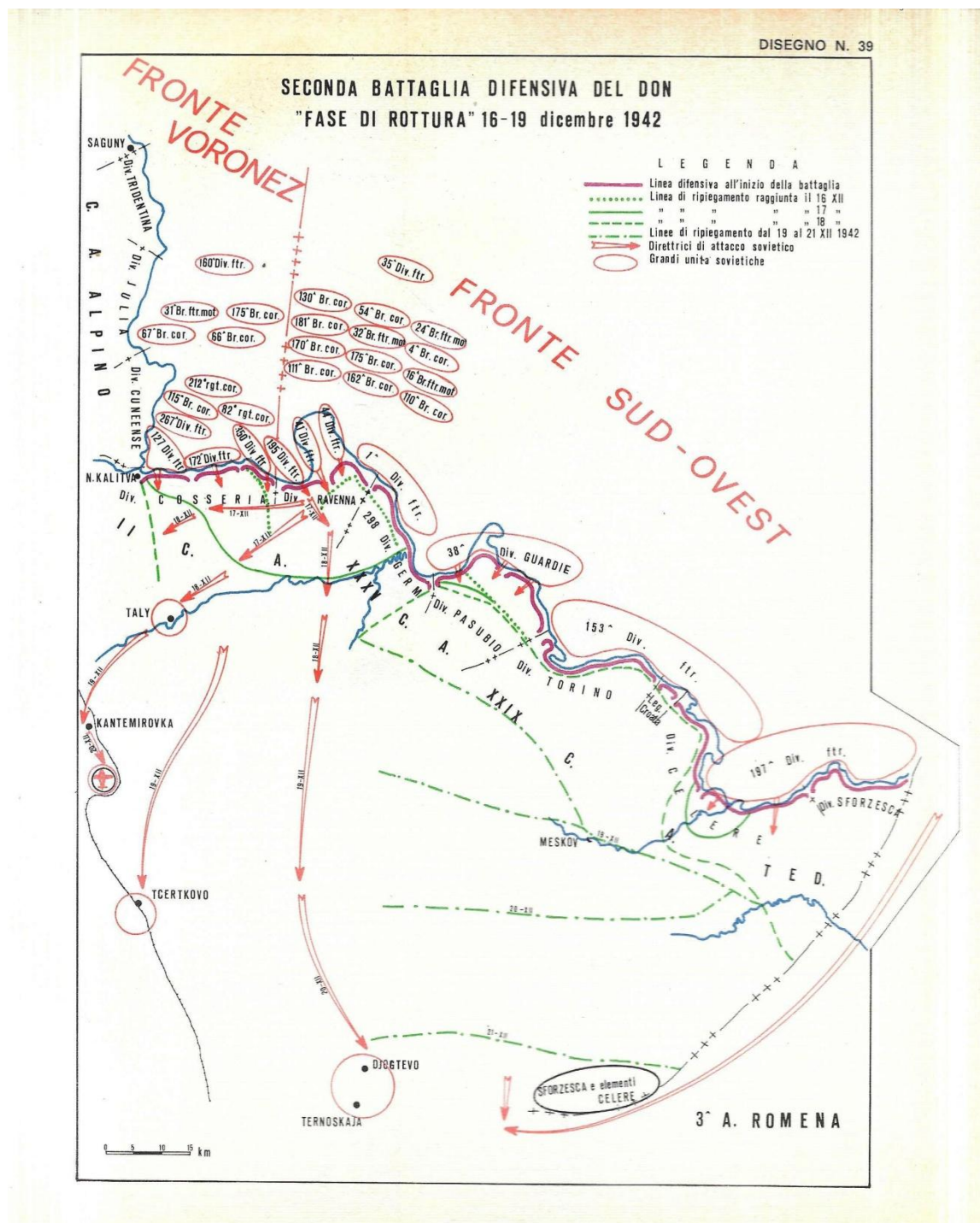
In five days, the two Soviet Armies, 6<sup>th</sup> and the Guard, had launched twenty-one attacks against the *Cosseria*, *Ravenna* and *Pasubio* Divisions, employing twenty-two to twenty-eight of their hundred and fifty battalions.

## B) THE BREAKTHROUGH PHASE (16-19 DECEMBER)

*(Drawing No 39)*

At the dawn of December 6 more than two hundred and fifteen hundred cannon began the "preparation" against the positions held by the

Map n.39



Italian II Army Corps (15). Despite the ware of the previous days, the defense forces, the Soviet asserted, "*opposed their resistance and often went to counterattack. To complete the breakthrough of the tactical defense it was necessary to intervene from the first day the Armored Corps. This fact resulted in the reduction of their combative efficiency for subsequent actions in depth. At the end of the day, the forces of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army were advanced four to five kilometers and those of the Guards Army of two or three kilometers*" (16) respectively against the *Cosseria* Division and the *Ravenna* Division.

The great force of penetration of the attack device led to a close encounter at the artillery stations whose servants, together with the remains of the infantry units, contained the first day of the advance of the Soviet rifles and Soviet tanks.

"*Strong combat continued on the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> of December*" (17), while in those days the enemy units were still in opposition, while the Soviet attack extended to the fronts of the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR and the German XXIX, against the *Pasubio*, *Torino* and 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Divisions.

After the Soviets succeeded in against the position of resistance, without the intervention of other appropriate Italian or German forces, the Attacking Grande Units entered the breach for twenty kilometers to the west, reaching Novo Kalitva, for as many kilometers to the south-east reaching the Levaja river; the 18<sup>th</sup> went deep thirty kilometers to Taly and for another twenty-five, the 19<sup>th</sup>, one in Kantemirovka, where the Rossosc - Millerovo railway was interrupted.

The enemy then extended the action even further south - east, against the southern wing of the Army. The Grande Units that were deployed, attacked frontally, and threatened by enemy armored elements, shortly after midday on the 19<sup>th</sup> they received the order to fall back.

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(15) The opponent's fire plan included: the preparation, lasting 70 to 80 minutes and to a depth of about 6 km; the support, to the depth of about 1.5 - 2 km; the accompanying infantry and tanks during combat within enemy defenses (Gen. Prof. A. RADZIEVSKI); in the Soviet Military Historical Magazine of March 1973.

(16) From the Soviet Military Historical Review of May 1972.

(17) From the Soviet Military Historical Review of May 1972.

DECEMBER 16

FRONT OF THE II ARMY CORPS.

*Cosseria Division and 385<sup>th</sup> German Division.*

At the sectoral limit with *Ravenna*, the entire night, the enemy had been carrying out continuous attempts of infiltration between the 318<sup>th</sup> German and the 38<sup>th</sup> infantry. In order to improve the situation, given the strong commitment of the Divisions of the right, the Commander of the Corps ordered the attack of a German police battalion (supported by a L/6 tank company of the LXVII Bersaglieri Battalion), under the orders of the Commander of the German 318<sup>th</sup>.

At 06:00 General Gazzale, Commander of the *Cosseria*, had given up the operating responsibility of the sector to the Commander of the 385<sup>th</sup> German Division. The two Commands remained in the same headquarters of Krasni, to ensure the recovery of the Italian units.

At 08:00 the situation was further aggravated:

- the deployment of 318<sup>th</sup> had been broken in several places and the village of Deresovka was cleared by the Germans;
- on hill 192, against the Italian attack supported by the tanks of the 27th Division, developed a very strong artillery reaction and an intervention of Soviet aircraft;
- Samodurovka was subjected to very strong enemy pressure;
- Gorohovka was teeming with enemy tanks. The required action of the XXXI group from 149/40 could not take place because, given the distance, the natural dispersion of the shot would have greatly reduced the effectiveness of the action.

At 09:00, Soviet air action went deep into all the rear of the Division, with widespread strafing and bombing.

At mid-morning:

- counterattack on hill 192 was partially successful;
- The I/90<sup>th</sup>, very tried, in the area of Samodurovka was practically surrounded and thought it could not withstand a long while trying to support it from outside with an Italian reinforced company from Zapkovo;
- The Commander of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division had the intervention of one of his battalions from Orobinski on Deresovka, to preserve the continuity of the line towards *Ravenna*.

At 12:00, enemy pressure continued to be high on the entire right side of the sector and made it impossible to recover any Italian units.

By midnight, the Army Command provided the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division with the task of maintaining contact between the sectors 385<sup>th</sup> - *Cosseria* and *Ravenna*.

The line to be defended should follow the course of the Don from Deresovka as far as it was possible, to round up the formed sack and reconnect to Gadjucce - Filonovo, reaching the XXXV Corps (298<sup>th</sup> Division) to the right.

The 385<sup>th</sup> Division would have to defend the north flank, from Cernaja Kalitva to Deresovka.

*Cosseria*, recovering its units (18), reinforced by those in arrival (19), was destined to form a security line supported by the dwellings between Dubovikof and Gadjucce, while the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored had to oppose the break through of enemy armored vehicles, task far beyond its potential.

In order to restore the situation, the *Cosseria* was planned to operate northeastern, departing from the Goly area (where the positions of 385<sup>th</sup> ended), which could only be carried out the next day, because the Division's forces had not yet been released and collected.

The Grande Units of which the allocation had been announced had not yet arrived in the area destined for their use (20).

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(18) The units of the *Cosseria* Division, or assigned to reinforcement, retained by the 385<sup>th</sup> Division at every point of the sector were:

- two battalions of the 90<sup>th</sup> infantry and the whole CC.NN. *Leonessa* group, units of the 539<sup>th</sup> Grenadier;

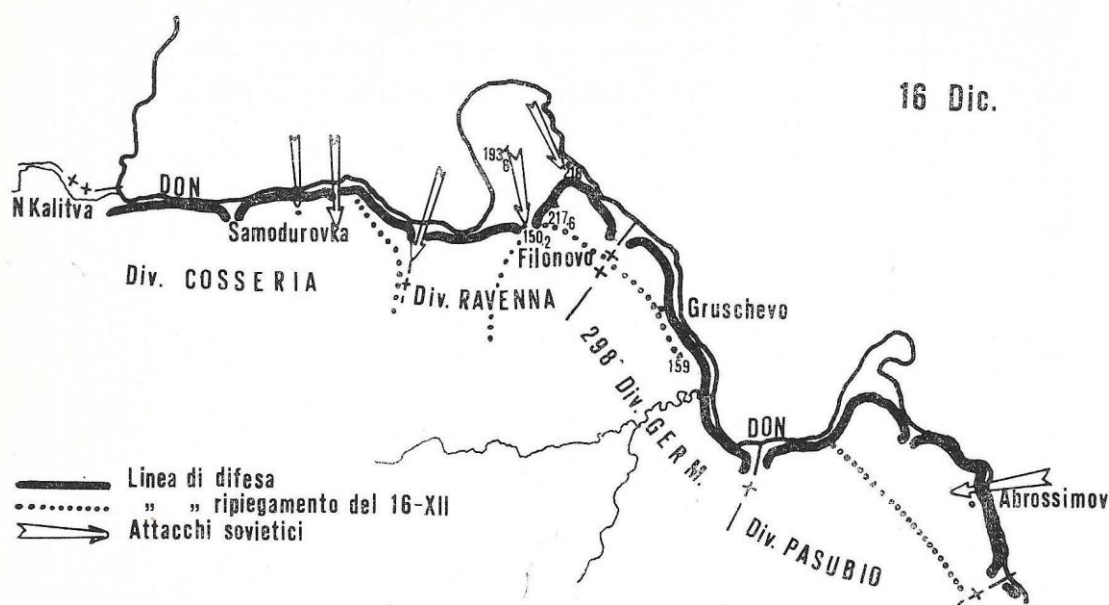
- the Colonel Maggio Group", with the Command of the 89<sup>th</sup> infantry, the I and II/89<sup>th</sup> and a battalion of the 90<sup>th</sup>;

- III/89<sup>th</sup>, combined with the 537<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers.

The divisional and reinforcement artillery should have stayed in cooperating with the 385<sup>th</sup> Division.

(19) Monte Cervino mountain skier battalions and various units of all engineering specialties, except for transmissions.

(20) This would be, roughly, the Julia Division, the 387<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Division, the SS Fegelein armored group (both by railroads to Mitrofanovka), the Schuldt group (two SS police battalions, one anti-tank group and four other companies, two light artillery groups, one howitzer battery), an anti-aircraft group of the air force) on the way to the railway station of Cercovo.



### *Ravenna Division.*

The entire night the battle had lasted to the sector limit with the 385<sup>th</sup> - *Cosseria*, with which *Ravenna* could not connect. The enemy's pressure was constantly increasing, tending to the flank positions of hill 158, while the strongpoint's resistance continued on the shore of Don.

At the first lights (06:20), observers, at the base of Verhnij Mamon's bend, heard Soviet tanks go down from hill 193.6 and others heading from Ossetrovka on hill 218. All the artillery of defense focused their fire on them.

At the same time the enemy attacked forces north of Krasno Orekovo on the front of a kilometer, between Krasno Orekovo and hill 217.6, while all positions were subjected to violent acts of fire. The Haempel self-propelled group was on alert. Phone lines with the front were interrupted.

At 07:15 two strongpoints of the 38<sup>th</sup> infantry and one of the 318<sup>th</sup> grenades on the contact line had been overcome and the tanks from hill 193.0 had already broken through some others.

At the time as the Soviet ground arm action, at 08:00, the aerial attack against the 38<sup>th</sup> infantry was also carried out, although with very little visibility.

At 09:00, the positions on the west side of Verhnij Mamon's loop were broken and a wave of Soviet tanks came to the villages of Krasno Orekovo, Gadjucce and Filonovo.

To somehow satisfy the needs of the *Ravenna*, the II Corps Commander assigned to the Division the reinforcement of the XLVII Motorcycle Battalion, of the LXVII Armored Battalion (less the company given to the 318<sup>th</sup>) and of the XIII Semoventi group (both with force significantly lower than the organic strength).

The first wave of about fifty tanks had been almost completely destroyed by the fire of the artillery and self-propelled vehicles of the German Haempel group,

At 10:30 the *Ravenna* was attacked:

- by the 195<sup>th</sup> Division, in the counter loop of Krasno Orekovo, where the line had been broken and the strongpoints were surrounded and overwhelmed one by one by tank units or crushed under the weight of them;

- by the 41<sup>st</sup> Guards Division, in the western part of the bend, on the road leading from hill 193.6 to hill 150.2;

- by the 44<sup>th</sup> Guards Division, in the eastern part of the loop, on the side of hill 218, where that salient had been lost. The tanks had eliminated the strongpoint defended by a company of the CII motorized machine gun battalion of the Army Corps, that had had inflicted great losses to the infantry, mowing within the fire of its twelve machine guns.

Against the *Ravenna* had already intervened the hundred tanks that prisoners had reported at Ossetrovka on the previous day.

The Commander of *Ravenna* (Gen. Dupont) counted to bring resistance to positions on hill 204.2 -hill 217.6 (or south slopes) - hill 196.3 (Solonzi) - Svinjuka, to cover the villages of Gadjucce and Filonovo from the north, collecting on them the retreating forces.

In the situation described, the Army Corps Commander did not have other forces to intervene in the fight.

At 12:00

- Soviet aviation was the mistress of *Ravenna* sky;
- the enemy was widening the gates in the mine fields to give more security to his armored forces;
- The 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division had in the sector only twenty self-propelled.

From the analysis of this situation it could be inferred that in the near future *Ravenna* would have reduced to Filonovo - Gadjucce, leaving open the way to an invasion on the rear of the deployment, of the 298<sup>th</sup> German Division.

General Zanghieri, also in agreement with the German liaison officer, exposing to the Army Command the serious situation in which was sent the entire Grande Unit, proposed to continue the resistance on Zapkovo - Orobinski - Dubovikof - Goly - hill 179.2 - Lufitzkaja line, which would have covered the Boguciar valley.

The Command of the Army Group "B" replied at 14:25 that no withdraw have been authorized and that the *Ravenna* Division would have to remain in place.

At 17:00 the division had a front line hill 217.6 - Filonovo - Balka di Gruscevo - hill 159, where it was linked to the German 298<sup>th</sup>, drawing on it the available infantry, deployed around the artillery and the few German tanks.

It was a thin veil of about three thousand men, exhausted by six days of fighting and fragmented out of organic constraints, as the incursion of events had not allowed the reorganization. Those forces were not able to deploy an appreciable defensive action due to the extension of the front in relation to their numerical consistency and the lack of any preparation that the deeply frozen soil did not even start in rudimentary form.

A good command of those soldiers was practically impossible, even for the almost total lack of means of connection with the deployed units.

The situation was made even harder by the violent action of the rocket launchers and the numerous Soviet planes that caused continuous losses. They also dropped ammunition for infantry weapons.

At 18:00, the Army Chief of Staff informed the II Corps Command that in the sector first shares of the *Julia* intervention group would arrive, followed shortly by the entire Division. The Alpine skiing *Monte Cervino* also came.

At midnight the Army Command:

- reiterated the general concept of defense to the extreme;
- it was essential that the 298<sup>th</sup> Division retain its positions, otherwise not directly attacked;
- the Haempel group went to the dependency of the *Ravenna*;



- put the temporarily dependent on the II Corps of 298<sup>th</sup> Division, providing that this and *Ravenna* should cooperate in close cooperation";
- entrusted to II Corps with the determination of responsibilities and contact lines between the two Grande Units.

#### FRONT OF THE XXXV ARMY CORPS - CSIR.

##### *Pasubio Division.*

At 06:00, without the preparation of artillery and rocket launchers, supported above all with mortars of every magnitude, the direct attack on the entire divisional sector began, especially in the Krasnogorovka - Abrossimova - Monastirscina section.

The forces of the 38<sup>th</sup> Guards Division, infiltrating in the balke, between 09:00 and 10:00, burst into the positions held by the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry south of Abrossimova, and forced the defenders to fall back on a more rearward line, almost coincident with that of the second position.

The attack was spreading, causing Abrossimova to fall and headed toward hills 187.9 and 206.3 and farther south, cutting off the Monastirscina valley and isolating that dwelling from the rear. The 1<sup>st</sup> anti-tank battery 75/32 of the I/201<sup>st</sup> that was opposing the enemy advance was completely destroyed, from the commander to the last gunner.

After having had some counter-assaults in vain, the II/80<sup>th</sup> infantry and a artillery section of the I/201<sup>st</sup>, through the valley of Artykulny Schlucht, fell back on the III/8<sup>th</sup> batteries, now they are threatened and forced to defend themselves firing at zero.

After the infantry, the staff of artillery observers withdrew. The last of them was those of the 7th and 9th batteries that, with their commanders, had to open the gap between the enemies who had already passed and isolated them.

The new and more retarded infantry deployment required the need to adapt to that of the III/8<sup>th</sup>. The retrograde movements were performed in perfect order with battery assemblies, the last of the 8<sup>th</sup> that, before withdrawing, inflicted heavy losses to the enemy who faced the ridge of hill 175.5.

III/80<sup>th</sup> attempted a resistance on hill 206.3,

The strongpoint of the area of the "hat of frigio" loop, which were invested in front, still resisted on the spot. The defenders of Olimpo were all in extreme defense. The loss of it compromised the I/8<sup>th</sup> situation, deployed in the valley below, threatened frontally and on the right flank. The group received the order to move backward, but under the gunfire of the attacker, the entire line of the pieces and almost all the staff were lost, along with a section of the 309<sup>th</sup> counter-aircraft battery and one section of the 73<sup>rd</sup> anti-tank battery.

The Montebello CC.NN. group countered the enemy on hill 187.9-hill 178.3 - hill 175.1, positions overlooking the Artykulny Schlucht valley.

The Army Command ordered that the *Pasubio* be supported by the 298<sup>th</sup> Division, with the 526<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers Tegiment and the XXIX German Corps, with all available forces.

In the afternoon, the intervention group of 298<sup>th</sup> German Division (a battalion of the 526<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers and a 150 artillery group) met at the *Pasubio* Command, which was assembled at the 525<sup>th</sup> battalion already deployed to block the base of the bend, from hill 201.1 to hill 156.0.

In the evening, the defense of the *Pasubio* Division took shape:

- to the left, on the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry line, intact until the south margin of Krasnohorovka;

- in center, by hill 156.0 to hill 201.1, entrusted to German units;

- to the right, on a line held by the 3 *Gennaio* CC.NN group, by the surviving elements of the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry, which had suffered losses of 50 to 60% of the staff, and a battalion formation (skiers, carabinieri, base personnel and the Headquarters).

The front of this battalion and the village of Monastirscina remained uncovered.

At Monastirscina resisted, barricaded in the church, the I/80<sup>th</sup>, could not reach the 81<sup>st</sup>, which had to retreat with considerable losses, leaving a wider gap between the two parts.

A reinforcement of the XXXV Army Corps arrived late in the evening, sent by the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command, a battalion of railroad men, one of the bridging engineers, one of the artisans engineers (with two companies) to be used as an infantry but scarcely endowed with unit weapons.

DECEMBER 17

FRONT OF THE II ARMY CORPS.

*385<sup>th</sup> German Division and Cosseria Division.*

During the night the temperature had dropped to -30°, increasing the already difficulties of those who had to fight in the open.

The elements of the services of 318<sup>th</sup> Grenadiers abandon Dubovikof by burning it.

At 03:00, a new attack with armored vehicles against Samodurovka and Deresovka was pronounced, placing in more serious crisis the attempt to re-connect the cut off 385<sup>th</sup> Division with that of *Ravenna*.

Reaching the artillery positions, the Soviet tanks overwhelmed the CXXIII group's 1<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> batteries of 149/13 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regimental group.

At 08:00, the rapid evolution of the events led the Commander of the II Corps to limit the task assigned to the *Cosseria* to form a "connector" between the 385<sup>th</sup> and the *Ravenna*, given the scarcity of forces available. The new line to occupy would have to pass for Goly - Sovkos Boguciarski – hill 168 – hill 209.3 (under Gadjucce), end point with which there was an element of resistance.

At 08:45 Soviet tanks and infantry from Dubravkof, they headed for Orobinski, opposed by a few pieces of 47 mm. Italian and 88 mm. German, threatening Krasni, the headquarters of three Division Commands (385<sup>th</sup>, *Cosseria* and 27<sup>th</sup> Armor).

On the streets, meanwhile, retreated movements were noticed.

These were rear area elements, which had been attached to those of the German services, whose withdraw had been planned since the previous evening.

At 09:30, the Commander of the *Cosseria* expressed to the Army Corps Command the conviction that the situation was very precarious, but he was told that with the remaining forces he would have had to organize a defensive connection between Ivanovka and Kusmenkof.

The aerial reconnaissance indicated the existence, on the front of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division, of nine passes on the Don: 5 gangways and 4 bridges.

At 10:15, the Commander of the II Corps took note of the Command of the Army that, when Orobinski and Zapkovo fell, the fall of Krasni would not be delayed; therefore, the new line to be run between Zapkovo and Tvjerdoklebovka was already overcome. It was the choice between the line Novo Kalitva - Ivanovka –

Kusmenkof and that Novo Kalitva - Deresovka - Kusmenkof. In both cases, the II Corps Command could no longer work while remaining in Taly, practically on the fire line. It had chosen Mitrofanovka as the new headquarters, which was also suitable for connections and communications. At Taly continued to operate the Tactical Command, all the heavy parts of the Command's offices at 12:00 had been started to Mitrofanovka.

At 13:50 the Chief of Staff of the Army personally sent to the Commander of the II Corps the orders of the German Supreme Command:

- at dusk the German Divisions 385<sup>th</sup> and 298<sup>th</sup>, with the Italian forces incorporated there, would retreat to the line Novo Kalitva - Zapkovo - Tvjerdoklebovka - Lufitzkaja – Boguciar village, the mouth of the Boguciar river on the Don, connecting to the left with the Alpine Corps and right with the *Pasubio* Division, to form a compact front;

- Line of contact between the Army II and XXXV: hill 182 - Vervekovka - Barsuki (also known as Bursakof). It was thus confirmed that the Division passed to the operational dependencies of the II Corps;

- the Italian units at that time framed by the German divisions could have, in the opinion of the Commander of the Army Corps, been joined in the sector separately, depending on the possibilities of the contingent;

- the units assigned to the II Army Corps (and not yet joined) by the Alpine Corps should have been used to reinforce the line.

The provisions of the German Supreme Command did not practically change those that had been put into place by the Italian Commanders at the time and not even those that had been given by the Commander of the Army Group shortly before;

It could have argued that the order kept little account of the situation in place, as it presumed that - with decimated counts in the number and worn out by seven days of uninterrupted struggle, with the 385<sup>th</sup> and the 298<sup>th</sup> Division, each without a regiment, with the two Italian Divisions so badly-it would be a "*compact size front*", with a development on the ground of about sixty miles, without even digging a hole for a man on the ground, in

a ground that the frost of the -27° in daylight made it hard as stone.

The Chief of Staff of the Army had also indicated the possibility of making variants to the ordered defensive line, if the pressure of the events had made it appear outdated, and he also mentioned the possibility to back it up to the meridian of Kantemirovka.

At the fall of the night, the tactical command of the II Corps reached Mitrofanovka.

At 20:00 the commander of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division told the Commander of the II Corps the situation of the sector:

- the occupied line departed from Don at Novo Kalitva with the two strongpoints N and W, held by the I/89<sup>th</sup>, continued for hill 221 (south-east of Koschiarni) - Zapkovo - Sorkj - Dolgj - Kusmenkof. Three German battalions were in the zone hill 190 and Zapkovo, elements of the 27<sup>th</sup> Armor at Sorkj, Italian Engineer forces and L/6 tanks between Sorkj and Dolgj. Between Dolgj and Kusmenkof there was an empty track that would be entrusted to the *Monte Cervino* battalion, which had come in the meantime;
- the extensive development of the line had not allowed full employment and therefore Italian transit units were also detained, in addition to those of the *Cosseria*, which for several days had not yet been replaced.

Throughout the day, on the positions of hill 192.0 lasted the resistance of the survivors of the strongpoints of II and III/90<sup>th</sup> of the *Leonessa* CC.NN group. and III/539<sup>th</sup> German, rejecting continuous attacks of the enemy.

The break-through of Soviet tanks coming from the east (areas of 318<sup>th</sup> and *Ravenna*), reaching Orobinski, behind the units, had led to the isolation and the need for them to lock themselves in their strongpoints; the Commander of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division then ordered the withdraw after midnight, breaking the enemy encirclement.

In the left sector (I/90<sup>th</sup>), the survivors, with scarce automatic weapons, folded down to the position of the battery pack, left with only one piece, and then on the 3<sup>rd</sup> battery of the I/108<sup>th</sup>. After long resistance, units withdrew on Zapkovo, protected by the 3<sup>rd</sup> mortar company of 81 of the divisional CV battalion, who sacrificed in a counter assault to facilitate the unblocking of the column.

The deployment of the divisional and reinforcement artillery, invested directly by the tanks, reacted with its own fire. The 2<sup>nd</sup> battery of the CXXIII/2<sup>nd</sup> of the Army Corps resisted until the night, but it was overwhelmed by the waves of the Russian infantry. A similar fate was the 1st and 2nd 75/18 battery of the I/108<sup>th</sup>. The batteries 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of 105/28 of the IV/108<sup>th</sup> could have left fighting the deployment zone, but on the track from Zapkovsko to Ivanovka, for fuel depletion, they had to destroy two pieces each. The 1<sup>st</sup> battery of the group had been overwhelmed by enemy infantry.

### *Ravenna Division.*

The fall of hill 217.6, which dominated the villages of Gadjucce and Filonovo, made both of them indefensible, and it was necessary to retreat to Sovkos Boguciarski and Perescepni,

The telephone communications between the Army Corps Command and the Ravenna's tactical command, carried to Gadjucce, were made precarious by the enemy's fire actions, which forced the telegraphic company's linemen to continue repairing the interrupts, operating with persistent consistency and admirable sense of duty.

Not all the units of *Ravenna* had flowed to Gadjucce and Filonovo. A thousand survivors of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry, who were left without ammunition after the prolong the fight, had continued from the positions infested by infantry or broken by Soviet tanks to reach Perescepni and the sector of the 298<sup>th</sup> Division.

The tactical link between the *Ravenna* and the 385<sup>th</sup> would be achieved by the 27<sup>th</sup> Armor (Haempel group) only after attempting to unlock Dubovikof.

The Commander of the Division, presented to the Army Corps Command at 09:30, orders received for:

- the forces present at Perescepni supported the Haempel group;
- a nucleus was constituted by Sovkos Boguciarski, as an element of the connecting line between the 385<sup>th</sup> and the *Ravenna*;
- The remaining elements focused on Tvjerdoklebovka, as the strongpoint and the supply reservoir of the two previous blocks, and that the Tactical Command of the Division would settle there.

Meanwhile, on the *Ravenna* front, six passages on the Don were made: 2 bridges and 4 catwalks.

In addition to these and those mentioned on the front of the 385<sup>th</sup> - *Cosseria*, they were in effect on that day on the front of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army: in the sector of the Alpine Army Corps, a passage on ice for light vehicles at Kulakovka and two ice catwalks to the northwest of Olkovatka; on the front of the XXXV Army Corps (*Pasubio* Division) a gangway between Ogalev and Abrossimova; none on the front of the XXIX German Corps.

At 10:30 was arriving at Perescepni also General Capizzi, commander of the *Ravenna* divisional Infantry, carried away from Gadjucce with the same tank as the commander of the Haufmann group. He assumed the command of an Italian group (formed around elements of the 37<sup>th</sup> infantry), coming into contact with the 298<sup>th</sup> Division, in order to contribute to the defense of the left flank of that from the north.

The withdraw movement, made inevitable by the impotence of the infantry in front of the masses of tanks, was carried out orderly, giving the impression that these were elements that could be used in combat, provided they were refreshed and conveniently armed.

In order to execute orders of the German Supreme Command, it was agreed that the *Ravenna* Command, with the personnel and the means that could be collected (including two L/6 tanks and three 47 semoventi tanks), would organize a defense of Kusmenkof, to prevent enemy infiltration in the valley of Boguciar and south. The following morning, the Division would receive the reinforcement of the *Monte Cervino* battalion. Similar functions would take Danzevo a German anti-tank group.

Particularly difficult was the rescue of the artillery, all motorized, and in general motor vehicles, fuel deficiency, more or less always felt, but more severe in those last days, when the stormy climate increased consumption.

At the end of the day, the Command of the Army Group "B" summed up in its own document the orders it had given to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command in the previous hours (*Document No. 105*)

The new dependence of the 298<sup>th</sup> German Division on the II Corps Command was, however, only nominal, since the document mentioned was a true commander of the Italian II Corps

the German liaison officer, Major General Kinzel Colonel.

The statement that this officer had held his headquarters in Taly after the timely transfer of the Tactical Command of the II Corps did not correspond to the facts, because Colonel Kinzel on the same afternoon of December 17 moved to Kantemirovka. If he had remained in Taly, he would soon lose any connection with the units he would have to direct operations, as the arrival of Soviet forces would have resulted in the interruption of at least wire communication, of the movement of the relays, and any other contact directed with deployed and in retreat.

The serious assertion that the II Corps had "*its headquarters withdrawn to Mitrofanovka*" could only derive from the erroneous interpretation of the shift of administrative and logistical offices.

However, the Army Command did not give any particular investment to Colonel Kinzel, and nothing had changed in the relationship between the Command of the II Corps and the divisions of *Ravenna*, *Cosseria* and 385<sup>th</sup> Germans.

298<sup>th</sup> German Division.

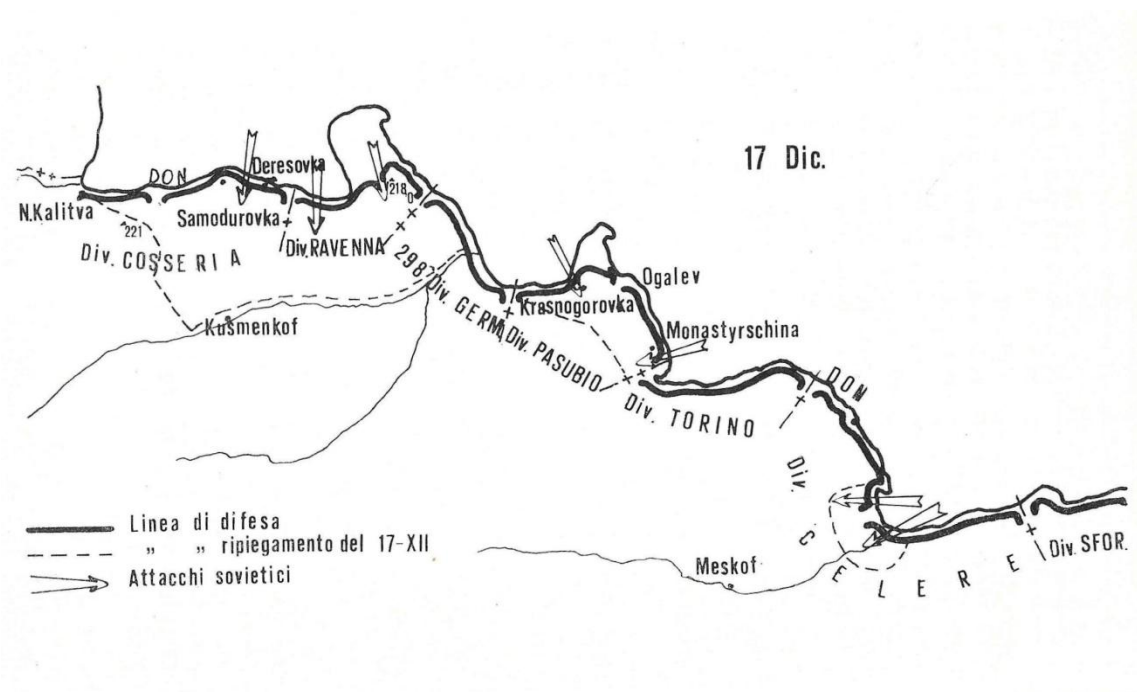
This Great Unit, as a consequence of the orders cited, had been relocated from the XXXV Army Corps to that of the II but its Command did not prove to be convincing.

Received reinforced of the Capizzi group (as the units of the *Ravenna* which had been co-operating with the 298<sup>th</sup> were then designated), the German Division commanded that the Italian units be deployed in their defense, entrusting them with the delicate function of rearguard echelon.

Meanwhile, the Division began withdrawing ordered by the Supreme Command for the only left wing, to be deployed on the Boguciar.

The same German Division, though without being pressed by the Soviets, instead of waiting on the planned line, moved far behind: crossing the ridge between the valleys of Boguciar and Levaja, surpassed the same course as Levaja and took position on the ridge of the right bank of the waterway, leaving the Boguciar main road open to the Soviet advanced and the secondary, but not negligible, of Levaja. The unforeseen retreat facilitated short-range enemy maneuvering





on the right wing of the Army (XXXV Army Corps) including also the same 298<sup>th</sup> Division and the *Pasubio* Division.

#### THE FRONT OF THE XXXV ARMY CORPS-CSIR.

##### *Pasubio Division.*

During the night, the new defensive line was organized that, retaining on the left the original positions on the Don (III/79<sup>th</sup>), Krasnohorovka's possession and all the "frigio cap", reached 3,500 meters southwest of Abrossimova, where it was arrested with the unaligned right wing (remains of the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry), while in Monastirina, until high night, still resisted, isolated, the I/80<sup>th</sup>.

As a result of the arrival in the sector of the 526<sup>th</sup> German Grenadier, the Command of the XXXV Corps ruled that the Italian forces deployed to the left of that unit (II and III/79<sup>th</sup>, II/80<sup>th</sup>, a railway engineer battalion and the 23<sup>rd</sup> Bridging company) went to the operational dependence of the German regiment, connected to the left in Tereskovo with the other forces of 298<sup>th</sup>.

The Soviet attack resumed at dawn against the positions south of Krasnohorovka.

After 10:00 the enemy attacked the front of III/79<sup>th</sup>. Rejected first time, he returned to attack with renewed tenacity and violence.

An open hole on the front of the II/79<sup>th</sup> was closed by the railroad battalion, arrived the night before at Getreide.

At about 22:00, the survivors of strongpoint 3 (III/79<sup>th</sup>), opening up a gap by hand to hand fighting, gathered in the other forces of the battalion.

At the end of the day, despite the activity, the enemy had not achieved decisive results but continued to develop his efforts to infiltrate strong patrols.

#### THE FRONT OF THE XXIX ARMY CORPS OF THE GERMAN ARMY.

##### *Torino Division.*

The units of the 153<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Division, moved to the right of Don in their action towards Monastirscina (*Pasubio*'s sector), extended their action to the south, occupying hill 162.9 which dominated the entire left wing deployment of the Division (III/81<sup>st</sup>).

The 81<sup>st</sup>, which had already intervened the previous day in Monastircina, strongly attacked the occupant without being able to dislodge him.

To restore the situation, the commander of the XXIX Corps ordered the shift of the III/82<sup>nd</sup>, in the second echelon, from the divisional sector right-to-left to the left, reinforcing it with a company of the CIV battalion machine guns.

The Division continued to cooperate with the *Pasubio*, supplying Paseka the Monastircina strongpoint (I/80<sup>th</sup>), isolated.

### *3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division.*

After the break through by the Soviets against the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army (19-23 November) at the beginning of the Battle of Volga, the *Celere*, located in the second row in the valley of Boguciar, had to change employment and take the front line of about 50 kilometers, already occupied by the 62<sup>nd</sup> German Division, to replace it, as it was called to operate elsewhere.

The *Celere* had deployed astride the lower course of Tihaja, where the course of Don described a convex curve south, between the *Torino* (left) and the *Sjorzesca*.

The different organic constitution between the Italian and the strongest German divisions had required, in order to compensate for the lesser availability of forces, that the *Celere* was strengthened by the Croatian Legion, to which a small stretch of front was intended, proportioned to its modest operational possibilities, to the far left, in contact with the *Torino*. They followed, from left to right, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri with all the forces projected in the front line. The second echelon was the only XIX Bersaglieri battalion.

Given the size of the front to defend, the Division had been reinforced by the XXVI mortar battalion of the *Torino* (less a company), by a company of the CIV machine gun battalion, by the LXXIII Mixed Group (149/40 and 210/22) of the Army.

The mobile elements (XLVII Motorcycle Battalion, LXVII armored battalion and XIII semoventi group) had been moved to the XXXV and II Corps for the current battle needs.

At 07:00 the Division was violently attacked on the line of contact between the VI and XIII battalions (6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri) and, after an hour, the attack extended to the entire front of the VI battalion, just east of the confluence of the Tihaja on the Don, where advanced Soviet elements penetrated in the direction of Tihovská.

To the north of Tihaja the attack extended and deepened on hill 163.3, threatening the Mrykin - Konovalof highway. The 7<sup>th</sup> battery of the II/120<sup>th</sup> had already been overwhelmed.

At 10:00 a counterattack of the XIX battalion, in the direction of the mouth of the Tihaja, was unsuccessful.

At 13:00, a strong Russian column was sweeping south of Tihovská, and the XIX battalion had to retreat to the west for over a kilometer to defend Batal'sckof, receiving the reinforcement of the 105<sup>th</sup> company of divisional artisans and of the 45<sup>th</sup> German railroad engineer company.

The XVI German observation group (200 men) was deployed at 15:00 in order to contain and reject the penetration of the enemy in the Tihaja valley.

At 16:30 hours a new attack in the direction of hill 163.3 threatened the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battery of the I/120<sup>th</sup> and even the town of Mrykin, the headquarters of the 120<sup>th</sup> Artillery Command, which was encircled there.

At the end of the day, the sector of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri had no immediate attacks and was replacing the Croatian Legion. But the enemy, from hill 163,3, tried to move from the south the positions held by the regiment, already isolated on the right.

In the sector of the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri, the enemy had fought a wide gap about 12 kilometers, penetrating for about 10, contrasted with the remains of the VI and XIX battalions of Bersaglieri, the 105<sup>th</sup> company of artisans and the 45<sup>th</sup> German railway company.

The XIII battalion kept the positions on the Don, isolated on the left by the enemy penetration on Birjukof.

#### *Sforzesca Division.*

The Division was deployed to the far right of the Army, in contact with the 7<sup>th</sup> Romanian Division (XXIII Army Corps). In the second decade of December, this was strongly attacked by Soviet infantry and tanks, at the line of contact with the *Sforzesca*.

The situation had been maintained in tolerable terms, with partial reversals of the Romanian line, to which the Italian deployment was adapted.

On 16 December, the 7<sup>th</sup> Division was forced to retreat for a dozen kilometers and, while maintaining contact at Gromok, the Italian Division was with the right-hand side uncovered.

By order of the XXIX German Corps, the *Sforzesca* should have sent a group of intervention in support of the

The situation in this Grande Unit worsened, the composition of the intervention group was increased and resulted in: III/53<sup>rd</sup>, II/54<sup>th</sup>, I/17<sup>th</sup> (less one battery), a company of the II Mortar battalions, at the orders of the commander of the divisional infantry.

At the end of the day, the Command of the Army Group ordered a retreat of the right wing of the XXIX Corps, which would be coordinated by the Commander of the Hollidt Group (formally the XVII German Army Corps). He also moved to Meskof, in the sector of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere*, two battalions already destined for the Schuldt group.

## 18 DECEMBER

### FRONT OF THE II ARMY CORPS.

Overnight, the remaining forces of the 385<sup>th</sup> German, *Cosseria* and *Ravenna* Divisions, beyond those intact by the German 298<sup>th</sup>, should have attempted to reconstruct a "*compact*" front, first preserving the original positions where it was possible (left wing of the 385<sup>th</sup>, with the forces of the "Colonel Maggio group" and right wing of the 298<sup>th</sup> southwest of the mouth of Boguciar) to limit the breadth of the breach created by the enemy.

For the forces that could have remained on the old positions, the task of resistance was facilitated by the availability of the long-established organization to withstand the incidence of winter.

It is more difficult for others to do the task they are doing. The units were facing the fight on unorganized positions, devoid of shelters, cross-linked wire, anti-tank obstacles, without full armament, with poor munitions. Last but not least, with a shaky moral force, not only by the physical exhaustion of the struggle and the march, but above all by the visible defeat, the feeling of being abandoned and of receiving no reinforcements, lack of fuel, the same environmental temperature dropped to -20°, - 30° C.

At 4:00, the Army commanded a more detailed order than that of the German Supreme Command for the division of duties between the various units of the II Corps:

- the line to be defended would be developed from Novo Kalitva to Zapkovo - Tvjerdoklebovka - Boguciar;
- to the left, between Novo Kalitva and Zapkovo, the 385<sup>th</sup> Division, reinforced by the available units of the *Cosseria*;
- to the right, from Tvjerdoklebovka to Boguciàr and then to the Don up to Teresckova, the 298<sup>th</sup> Division, reinforced by the available units of the *Ravenna*;
- in the space not occupied by infantry between Zapkovo and Tvjerdoklebovka, the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division (less the Haempel group, together with 298<sup>th</sup>) would have carried out mobile actions tending to control the existing void;
- the parts of the Alpine Corps, intended to cover the entire *Julia* Division, should have been started to the right wing of the 385<sup>th</sup> to fill the existing void and would have to carry out their task possibly by attacking the enemy;
- every palm of land had to be defended to the uttermost;
- in the Taly area, relying on the strongpoint of the former headquarters of the Command of the II Corps, all the units being reorganized in the area that had been on the rear of the II Corps had to be used;
- new forces were under way: the SS Fegelein (by the name of the commander) of consistency equal to a Brigade (21) to be employed in the Boguciar valley to prolong the left wing of the 298<sup>th</sup>, and the 387<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Division, which would be unloaded by trains in the northern area of Kantemirovka.

The break through of Soviet armored vehicles had allowed the enemy to reach Ivanovka, six kilometers south of Novo Kalitva, and therefore the unblocking of the units that had defended the resistance position was difficult. For example, the defenders of hill 192, survivors of five battalions, at 05:00 in Zapkovo, had found the fieldwork (built for the second position by the Leonessa group) already occupied by the enemy and, to continue, they had to conquer them. They were divided into two columns, after they had been attacked, they had opened the way but were reduced to a total of two hundred men.

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(21) Two SS battalions, a Sturm Geschütze battery, an anti-tank company, an artillery group, an assault tank company, reinforced by the 15<sup>th</sup> police regiment.

The Commander of the Army Corps, in the execution of the orders of the Supreme Command, intended to strengthen Taly's defense, to develop an offensive action in the Boguciar valley, to connect it with the 298<sup>th</sup> Division at Tvjerdoklebovka. The Command of the XXXV Corps had already informed the Division that, as has already been said, that Division had been in the course of the ordered movements, without specifying which movements it was, nor had it replied to the question whether the occupation of Tvjerdoklebovka had been secured. The 298<sup>th</sup> Division instead of deploying, withdrew on its southern left bank of the Boguciar its left wing, under the protection of the Capizzi group was taking a different position, sitting on the cliff located on the right bank of the Levaja, in contact with the *Pasubio*, leaving open to the penetration of the enemy the valley of Boguciar.

At the first lights of the day, the enemy, who had already had a push with seven tanks at 02:00, began Taly's investment, the mainstay of a Boguciar bend, with covered posts and trenches and shelter for the staff, initially defended by forces equal to two battalions and an Italian battery (22), partially made up of veterans from the line and very proven, with many frozen. The enemy developed attacks throughout the day, supporting the infantry with some tanks.

At 07:30, the truck column began at Mitrofanovka with the first elements of the *Julia* intervention force (23).

Early in the morning the enemy attacked the defense of Novo Kalitva, still held by the remains of I and II/89, who rejected the Russians, inflicting them heavy losses and capturing prisoners. The action was conducted with the aid of the nearby *Cuneense* Alpine Division.

As the Commander of the II Corps informed the Command of the Army, it was important not to note that a continuous line existed only south of Novo Kalitva until Ivanovka. More to

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(22) Two companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sappers Battalion, 104<sup>th</sup> Engineer company (without automatic weapons), 23<sup>rd</sup> Bridging company (with two machine guns), two platoons of the XXXII anti-tank, a flamethrower platoon, 52<sup>nd</sup> anti-aircraft battery of 20 mm., a reinforces company (without automatic weapons), a 75/18 battery of the *Cosseria*, a 75/32 section of the III/201<sup>st</sup>, the 2<sup>nd</sup> chemical company. There was also a German pioneer company and the Andersen anti-tank group with 18 guns.

(23) Alpine battalions *L'Aquila* and *Tolmezzo*, 83<sup>rd</sup> A/T company of 47 mm., the 13<sup>th</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> battery of 75/13, 45<sup>th</sup> anti-aircraft battery of 20 mm., elements of the telegraphic engineers.

the south and in the Boguciar valley the situation was fluid. Only reliable news was that of Taly's resistance. On the other hand it was very difficult to start from the rear area reinforcement elements, due to the lack of fuel.

The Command of the Alpine Corps told that, in order to accelerate its intervention, the *Cividale* battalion also had the road transport, while the rest of the *Julia* would have made the planned transfer on foot.

They began to intervene in the battle even the Alpine Grande Units. In fact, in the evening (at 20:00) on December 16, the Army Command had ordered the transfer to the II Corps of the entire *Julia* Division, to be replaced in line with the *Vicenza* Division.

The operation for the bulk of the *Julia* was rather complicated, as the Commander of the Army Corps, knowing the limited operational efficiency of the *Vicenza* Division (it was, among other things, devoid of artillery), had prescribed that in the Division only one of its battalions (of the 277<sup>th</sup>) took position on the Don and another of the same regiment remained in second echelon. Another battalion (of the 278<sup>th</sup>) would be second echelon in the *Cuneense* Division, the third (of the 277<sup>th</sup>) was destined for Rossosc's defense, two of 278<sup>th</sup> were second echelon in the *Tridentina* Division.

In the sector of the *Vicenza* (formally of the *Julia*) would flow instead:

- from the *Tridentina*, the Alpine battalions *Vestone* and *Morbegno*;
- from the *Cuneense*, the Alpine battalion *Pieve di Teco*.

To equip the *Vicenza* Division of small-scale artillery two groups of 75/27 (two batteries) were assigned of the horse artillery regiment, while the reinforcements of other artillery and artillery of the Army Corps and the Army.

The measures taken were made necessary not only by the need to bridge *Vicenza's* organic gaps, but also because the Division left even in the same composition of its battalions, formed from the mobilization centers in Italy with personnel of too different origins (sailors, airmen, artillerymen), with a framework not entirely suited to the tasks recently received.

In the logistic center of Kantemirovka a very complex situation was determined. For the continuous influx of personnel, vehicles, baggage wagons, carriages and sleds and for the impossibility of the local



Command of the stage to render convenient order to all that extraordinary movement, the town had been blocked. Everyone was looking for shelter, hot drink, comfort food, while the ability to give them was limited and could not be met at the same time.

Those men whose numbers we do not have precise data, but could range from a minimum of 3,000 to a maximum of 6,000, organized by their direct commanders, depending on the sub-division in the strongpoint, had lost the habit of living within the scope of the higher unit and had moved as they were, gathered in small units, not in mass. Many had come to Kanremirovka only because they had not found shelter in other places while trying to escape the stiff temperature.

The Commander of the II Corps asked the Army Corps to designate suitable locations for the decentralization of that mass, also to favor a first count, distinguishing it by unit, by refusing to follow organic reorganization. He added that Kantemirovka was not suitable for the purpose, because it was located in the rear of the XXXV Army Corps and a base of the Quarter Master. Finally, if Taly had fallen, the town would be even more unsuitable.

He anticipated the possible reconstruction of three battalions of about 900 men and one with about thirty officers: one for each of the *Ravenna* and *Cosseria* Divisions, one for the Army Corps and for the Army, formed on four companies of four platoons each, respecting as far as possible organic origin, so that it would be easier to align.

He suggested that the units were moved as soon as possible:

- to Novo Markovka, the *Ravenna* Division, by 12:00 on the 19<sup>th</sup>;
- to Sofievka, the *Cosseria* Division, by 18:00 on the 19<sup>th</sup>;
- to Nikolskoje, Army Corps and Army, by 18:00 on the 19<sup>th</sup> day.

The proposals were all welcomed by the Army Command, which insisted on the urgent need to postpone newly reconstituted units.

It would have been very difficult, though, to find efficient units among those troops, where everything was lacking, weapons, equipment, transportation, equipment and even, in some cases, individual armaments.

At 15:00, the Army Command changed the operational dependence of the 298<sup>th</sup> Division from the II Corps and its return to XXXV - CSIR.

In the afternoon, the commander of the German Fegelein group, who came to the sector before his unit, came to the Command of the II Corps. General Zanghieri directed him to a hypothesis of offensive employment aimed at establishing contact, through the valley of Boguciar, with the 298<sup>th</sup> Division. The German commander accepted the idea of cooperation, provided that the autonomy of his unit was respected.

At 16:30 the Commander of the Army apprised that on the same day, he would be established in Kantemirovka the Command of the XXIV Armored Army Corps to take command of the 298<sup>th</sup> Division and all other German units employed in the sector of the II Army Corps and Alpine Corps, like those in the process of being occupied, reserved orders for tactical insertion. The II Corps thus lost command not only to German units but also to the Italian ones, given to reinforce the Germans, while maintaining the operational responsibility of the sector.

The Army Command set the Malcevskaja, Tcertkovo, Kantemirovka, Rossosc, Jevdakovo, Millerovo garrisons in alarm to implement their defense projects, avoiding the use of transit units.

Taly's garrison, short of ammunition, was attacked in the afternoon, and again more strongly in the early hours of the night.

At the end of the day:

- 385<sup>th</sup> Division held the line from Novo Kalitva to Ivanovka;

- In Novo Kalitva the continuous action of the enemy had also been rejected by the fire and by the counter-assault of I and II/89<sup>th</sup>, reinforced by the *Mondovì* alpine battalion, sent by the *Cuneo* Division. The attacks were particularly violent between the hours of 13:00 and 16:00;

- at dusk a strong column of Soviet infantry and armored vehicles had entered Zapkovo;

- the units surrounded to the south of Deresovka were back in the fighting lines and carrying heavy weapons;

- on the right of the 385<sup>th</sup> operated part of the 27<sup>th</sup> armored;

- there was no news of the situation of Sorkj and Dolgj;

- overall losses were very high;
- the units 387<sup>th</sup> Division and the Fegelein Group began to arrive.

#### THE FRONT OF THE XXXV ARMY CORPS - CSIR.

##### *298<sup>th</sup> German Division.*

After leaving the positions on the Don outside contact with the enemy and folding on the right bank of Levaja, between Don and Radtscenskoje, in the early hours of the evening he came into contact with Russian infantry and Mongolian cavalry.

The deployment of the Division was connected to the right by the Capizzi group, with the Pasubio (III/79<sup>th</sup>).

The Levaja Valley was now in possession of the enemy.

##### *Pasubio Division.*

Since dawn, the 38<sup>th</sup> Guard Division resumed attacks on Don's right-wing positions at Gluboki Schlucht (III/79<sup>th</sup>). Attacks, ten in the day, despite the vicissitudes, did not get much success as they were lost only one strongpoint.

Strong action against central positions on hill 201.1, held by the battalion of the 525<sup>th</sup> grenadiers and by the 3 *Gennaio* grouping, had been sharply rejected with great losses of the enemy.

In the right sector (80<sup>th</sup> infantry) the attacks had been cut off by artillery.

In Monastircina, the I/80<sup>th</sup>, was encircled, but continued to resist.

A Soviet cavalry unit appeared on the right side of the sector.

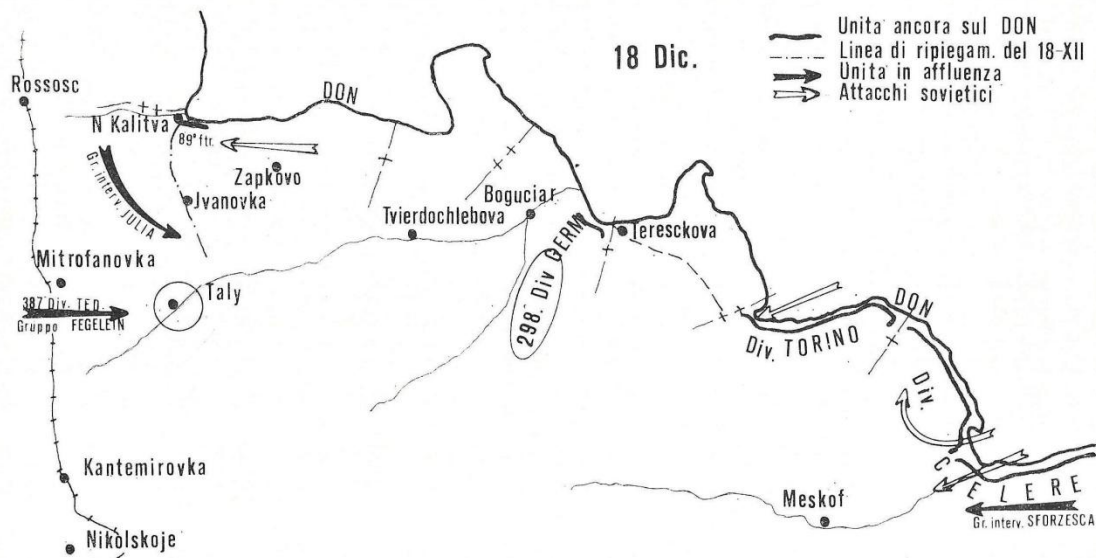
The Division had received another "company", the 16<sup>th</sup> chemical company and the 1<sup>st</sup> motorcycle company.

#### THE FRONT OF THE GERMAN XXIX ARMY CORPS.

##### *Torino Division.*

All day long the counterattack for the hill 162.9 which was regained, to the left sector margin with the *Pasubio*.

The III/82<sup>nd</sup> transferred to the left wing had aggravated the situation. The enemy had managed to occupy some centers of fire, but a counterattack had reestablished the situation.



*3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division.*

At 03:00 there was a violent attack on the divisional sector limit with *Torino*, while there was a strong air bombardment on Meskof. Other attacks were developed and rejected in the night, against the right of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri and in the Tihaja valley.

The enemy infiltrated new infantry, mortar and artillery forces and at 07:00 resumed the attack on Birjukof and against the right wing of the Division, which lasted for the entire day. The effort was made to move to the right of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri, to deepen penetration into the Tihaja valley and to reach Meskof.

Towards noon, in the right sector, the *Sforzesca* intervention group (Vaccaro), with III/53<sup>rd</sup>, moving from Kalinovski, regained positions of hill 154.9, but they were immediately overwhelmed, resisting for the rest of the day.

*Sforzesca Division.*

While the intervention forces fought in the *Celere* sector, the Command of the XXIX Army Corps issued a withdraw order to be executed the next night to the line between the outlet of Tihaja and the Tcir valley, joining the left to the Vaccaro group, to which the XIII Bersaglieri battalion was also attached.

During the night the line from Merkulov to Verhnij Tokin was to be reached, on the next night the line Tihaja - Tcir, until Gracev (excluded).

*19 DECEMBER*

FRONT OF THE II ARMY CORPS.

During the night, the Command of Army made the passage of operational responsibility from the Italian II Army Corps Command to that of the German XXIV Armored Army Corps, established in Golaja, without carrying with them any combat force.

By that order (*Document No. 106*), the natural guide for reconstitution was made available to the united Italian units as a means of making them "*the characteristics of combat units*" with the ultimate purpose of re-use as fast as possible.

The Command of the XXIV Corps had entered its functions without formalities, even against the provisions of the Army, simply

disconnecting the telephone contacts between the II Corps and the German Grande Units, with which they also cooperated with the Italian units of the same II Army Corps.

The battle around Taly continued without interruption. General Zanghieri, in a telephone conversation with the Army Commander, repeated the notion of Kantemirovka's inability to rearrange the units, especially if Taly's resistance ceased and suggested the possibility of a transfer to the west in the area of Voroscilovgrad, or north, in the rear of the Alpine Corps.

General Gariboldi insisted on the urgent need to supply the on-line units, to be brought back to that of reorganization, although the measure could only be implemented with heterogeneous squads and hasty recollections.

However, in Kantemirovka, operations were under way to form and start the three blocks set up on the previous day in the localities and within the planned times.

Everyone knew that the Soviets were advancing, but the precise signal that enemy tanks were heading from Taly on Kantemirovka had reached about 08:00 in the morning.

When the shapes of Soviet tanks appeared on the hills above the railway station and stopped to observe, they were deemed to be German armor. But the cannons that were directed at the inhabited village of men immediately made it clear to everyone who was concerned.

In addition to the numerous soldiers, there were about 300 vehicles ready in the vast square of Kantemirovka and with the engines turned on because of the very low temperature.

The cannons and gunshots of the tanks caused surprise, disorientation, and panic. The great mass of men quickly swept out of the square, trying to escape anyway. There was a general run to the cars, some of which went empty, to get away faster. Kantemirovka abandoned in chaotic groups of overwhelming men's vehicles and other groups of soldiers on foot, which had not had the chance to get on the lorries. The disordered mass later dispersed in the direction of Belovodsk, Starobelsk, Tcertkovo, Millerovo and other itineraries, in a general blunder of soldiers of all origin, then in the localities and in the units most unforeseen. Also abandoned were the armament, equipment, and every cumbersome thing that could have slowed the movement.

An analogous phenomenon had taken place at the train station, where trains were already loaded with staff waiting to leave.

The few remaining, largely officers, went to the town, in order to bring order among those who were still uncertain about what to do, made a target of the fire of enemy elements that were now marching through the semi-deserted streets. Some officers had managed to retrieve a vehicle and overcome the column of men on foot, to take command and bring them back to the disciplinary and organic sphere. In Belovodsk, part of the 38<sup>th</sup> infantry was brought back to order and had made a stand in defense of the logistics base. The next day they had moved neatly to Vorosilovgrad.

Units and personnel remaining in Kantemirovka, under the leadership of the Chief of the General Staff of the Quarter Master, resumed the normal activity, first of all the removal from Vorosilovgrad of the field hospitals and the most useful materials of the Quarter Master's warehouses.

The life of the town was made more difficult by the action of the partisans working in the small units.

The episode of Kantemirovka, which, in the respect of the truth attested by direct testimonies, is here narrated without euphemisms and without dialectical artifices aimed at masking the unimaginative reality of the affair, has been and remains an isolated fact of the Italian campaign in Russia.

It should therefore not lead to free generalizations, even as it involved less than two per cent of the total force involved in Don's second defensive battle.

Without indulging in anything about the behavior of those soldiers, however, it should be considered that they all came from an unprecedented fight lasting about ten days, a struggle that had exhausted them in physics and morale and had made them incapable of any reaction. To this is the clear awareness of each one that not even the sacrifice of all the men of the Army would have been enough to stop the overwhelming rage of iron and fire, which placed, amongst other things, in front of every Italian soldier in the sector invested by no fewer than five Russian soldiers.

For the II Army Corps Command, the reorganization of the units and their reconstitution was even more pressing, possibly followed by a rest phase

to restore moral and operational efficiency. But any purpose in that sense seemed to strike against the will of the Army Command, which required the immediate re-use of men.

The situation in Taly was serious: the reserves of all kinds were running out, the attacks continued, and the German units did little to cooperate. In the afternoon, the Army Command ordered General Dupont, Commander of the *Ravenna*, to replace the Germans in the Taly defense and to reunite with all the Italian units.

Towards the end of the afternoon, the following situation took place at the XXIV Corps:

- The front of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division had been broken, but the west crest line of Nova Kalitva was held - hill 176 - hill 209 (southwest of Ivanovka);

- The Fegelein Group was making the line: Deresovatka - Atamanski - Scelobok, to connect the 385<sup>th</sup> with Taly, still defending.

The XXIV Corps intended to retain that line, obviously covering the Rossosc - Millerovo railway.

Meanwhile, *Cosseria* picked up her own units from the east, waiting for the return of the 90<sup>th</sup> infantry flowing to Kantemirovka and settling in the Pelagejevka area.

Three battalions of *Julia* were about to join the intervention group.

#### THE FRONT OF THE XXXV ARMY CORPS - CSIR.

The situation had not undergone any significant changes during the night, as it was reconfigured the order of resistance in place, to limit the breach to the Boguciar watercourse.

At 12:00 the Commander of the Corps learned at the Command of the 298<sup>th</sup> German Division that the Army Command had ordered to transfer this to the orders of the German XXIV Armored Corps and its retreat onto the right bank of Tihaja. In the XXXV Corps would remain the only the *Pasubio* Division.

The Soviet tanks also played a part in Tcertkovo, where the Italian garrison (complementary units for the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* just arrived from Italy and intentional services) rejected the attack,



beginning with the resistance that, fueled by Italian and German forces, would last for almost a month.

*298<sup>th</sup> German Division.*

It had not been attacked on the positions occupied the previous day and it still had the Capizzi group (about two *Ravenna* battalions with reinforcement elements), two battalions of the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry and a reinforced engineer battalion.

At 12:00 it went to the dependencies of the XXIV German Armored Corps.

*Pasubio Division.*

During the night it contained the strong pressure of the enemy. The usury of the units were such that the combined forces of the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry and the IX divisional mortar battalion accounted for 659 men, with thirty-three officers. The remaining units were not in better condition.

At 12:30, General Zingales, Commander of the Army Corps, went to the Command of the Division, announcing the order, just before received, to withdraw south, on the right bank of Tihaja, between Verchnjakovski and Nasarov.

On the right was not possible to establish a connection with the *Torino*.

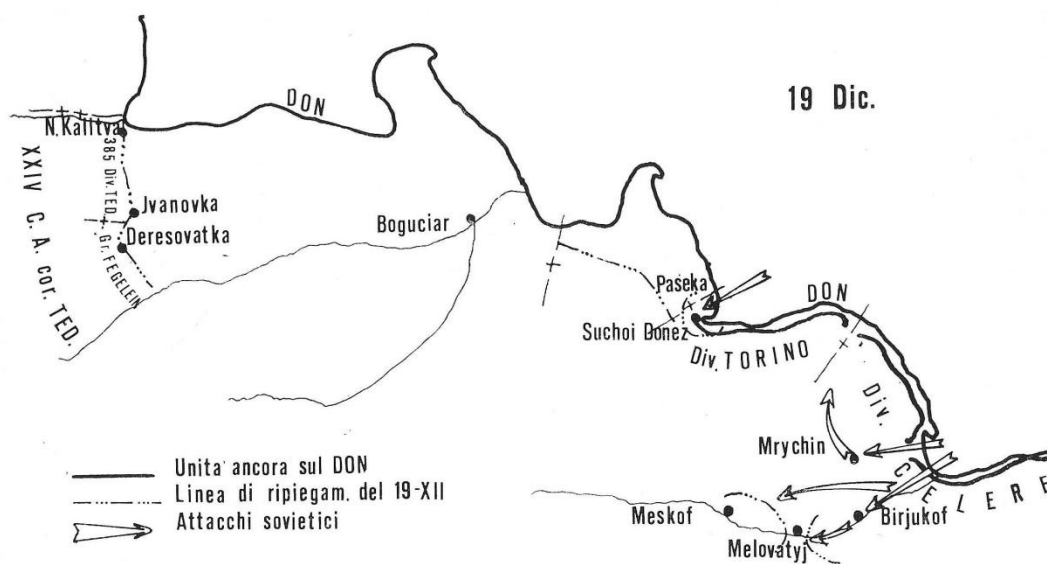
#### THE FRONT OF THE GERMAN XXIX ARMY CORPS.

Even for this Grande Unit, the rank of resistance was still in place, although the events of the previous day near the three Divisions had invalidated its validity, but at 10:00 the Army Command ordered the move on the secondary positions.

*Torino Division.*

It remained on the Don, though threatened by a shift to the right, where an attack on Surof had been rejected; it could not connect to the left with the *Pasubio*.

In the divisional ranks, at Kriniza, they already fought against enemy infiltrations. The remains of the III/82<sup>nd</sup> had to fall on Paseka, asserting themselves to face northwest; another attack was rejected near Suchoj Donez.



*3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division.*

At 06:00, when all the expected reinforcements had not come, a counterattack had been prepared with the available forces: the enemy, however, prevented action with strong attacks on the right (6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri) and in the southwest part of Mrykin (3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri), with the obvious aim of advancing in the Tihaja valley, widening the breach between the two regiments and falling on the rear of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri, pushing to Meskof.

At 10:00, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri still resisted the Don, though strongly pressed in front and threatened on the rear; the units located at the Tihaja valley were retreating from Birjukof to Melovatyj under enemy pressure; Meskof was directly threatened.

The Command of the XXIX Army Corps, at 14:00, ordered that all units be withdrawn over the Tihaja to take over the defense of Meskof-Provalskij between the *Torino* and *Sforzesca*.

*Sforzesca Division.*

The movements ordered to reach the midway line between Merkulov and Verhnij Tokin and Tihaja - Tcir had been carried out before 04:00, realizing the reunion with the Vaccaro group. This, attacked at 05:00 by considerable forces, resisted on the spot until at 10:00 and then led to the hills south - east of Varvarin and east of Kalinovski.

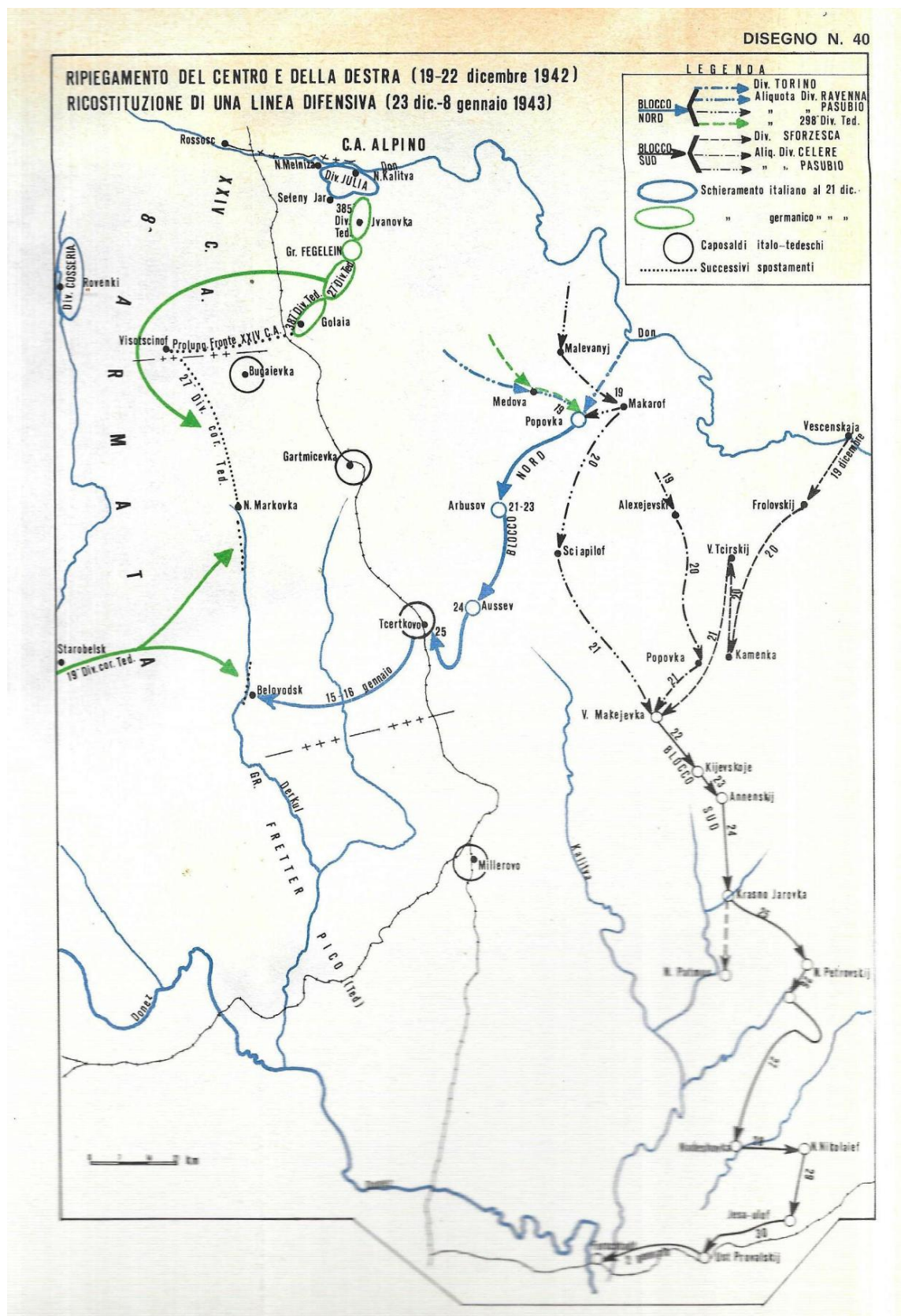
C) WITHDRAW OF THE CENTER AND THE RIGHT  
OF THE 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY (19 TO 22 DECEMBER)  
(*Drawing No 40*)

The unfavorable performance of the operations on the front of the II Corps, the offensive replay against the XXXV Corps (*Pasubio Division*), the extension of the attacks on the whole front of the XXIX German Corps and the worsening of the situation on the front of the contiguous 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army had led Generali Gariboldi to propose to the Command of the Army Group "B", until December 17, the need for a noticeable retraction of the line to replenish a new continual defense.

The attrition of the Italian first line divisions had reduced their already limited organic availability,

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map N.40



the inflow of fresh units (385<sup>th</sup> German Division and smaller Italian and German units) served only to fuel the struggle in the first phase of the battle, the arrival of other Grande Units (*Julia* Division and 387<sup>th</sup> German Division) was announced and in progress, but did not offer ground-breaking opportunities. Therefore, for the new line of resistance, a less extensive course of the previous one had to be studied, which followed the course of the Don in all its tortuosity. It had been suggested to follow the course of the Rossosc - Millerovo railway line, leaving unchanged the intact the front of the Alpine Corps and, continuing southward, to find the connection with the Don Army Group, which was fighting to join the 6<sup>th</sup> German army isolated for about a month at Stalingrad.

The proposal was not accepted, because, the Command of the Army Group "B", in accordance with the provisions of the German Supreme Command, had followed the criterion of giving as little land as possible.

On the other hand, the erroneous interpretation that the Command of the 298<sup>th</sup> Division had given between 17 and 18 December in order to withdraw its left wing on the Boguciar, leaving the valley open, could not be blocked by the resistance of the modest garrison of Taly had allowed the Soviet armored forces to reach and stop at Kantemirovka the railroad that theoretically wanted to cover.

The offensive against the *Pasubio* and against the XXIX German Corps, especially against the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere Division*, was achieving new results.

On the 18<sup>th</sup>, the Army Command had once again called for the return of the Grande Units to prevent their imminent destruction from benefiting the enemy to open up a larger breach. But the answer "the Führer wants to resist" was the reply between the plan of a rational discussion and the totally uncritical one.

Only the aggravation of the situation - determined jointly by the Kantemirovka episode, the further downturn in the XXIX German Corps and the negative events of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army - led the Command of the Army Group "B" at 15:00 on Dec. 19<sup>th</sup>, the deployment of the Grande Units operating south of the Alpine Corps, so that it could be possible to form a retracted line on the Ticho Sciuravskaja - Meskof valley Tcir,

## DECEMBER 19 (AFTERNOON HOURS)

### FRONT OF THE ALPINE ARMY CORPS (24).

The *Julia* Division was being replaced with the insertion of the *Vicenza* Division in its place.

The far-right deployment of the Army Corps, and particularly the positions held at Staro Kalitva by the *Cuncense* Division, underwent violent air bombardments. The counter-aircraft artillery shot down two enemy aircraft and seriously damaging four more.

The *Saluzzo* battalion (extreme right of the *Cuneense* sector) intervened in a sectoral counterattack, cooperating with the remains of II and III/89<sup>th</sup> infantry (Division of *Cosseria*), which still resisted in the area of Novo Kalitva.

The *Julia* intervention group was employed by the Germany XXIV Armored Army Corps in the Kriniscnaja - Selenj Jar Ivanovka area.

### II ARMY CORPS.

It had reorganization of the units and had no operational responsibilities.

### FRONT OF THE XXIV ARMORED ARMYCORP.

The enemy continued his pressure on the front between Novo Kalitva and Ivanovka, where the enemy's action was effectively countered by the defense, consolidated by the influence of the *Julia* intervention group and the Fegelein group. Taly's resilience continued.

The 298<sup>th</sup> Division was assigned to the XXIV Army Corps, formally part of the XXXV CORPS and the II Italian Corps.

### SECTOR OF THE XXXV ARMY CORPS - CSIR.

It executed the withdraw orders, but the threat on the rear was more and more prominent, carried by substantial Soviet armor in the Levaja valley.

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(24) I will continue to make use of the "front" phrasing only when the deployed units maintain a continuous line. I will use the "sector" phrasing when the unit moves without holding a continuous line.

During the execution of the withdraw order on the line Radtsenskoye - Medova - Karaseev - Meskof - Provalski - Napolef - Gracev, a batch of Soviet armored vehicles, which reached Kriniza, had exceeded the maneuver in progress.

At 15:00, after the new orders of the Command of the Army Group "B", the 8<sup>th</sup> Army commanded the employment of the new retreat: Ticho Sciuravskaja - Meskof - Tcir valley, intending to form two pillars, essentials for the purposes of defense:

- at Ticho Sciuravskaja, with the units of the left wing of the 298<sup>th</sup> Division;
- at Meskof, with the Schuldt group.

In addition, in order to bridge the gap between the inner wings of the XXXV - CSIR and XXIX German Army Corps, he had the third infantry regiment of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division discharged from the trains at Tcertkovo railway station.

#### *Pasubio Division.*

Towards 13:00 it was ordered to go south and reach the right bank of Tihaja, between Verchnjakovski and Nasarov, to take its position facing north, passing through Karaseev and Michailovka.

On the same evening, at about 21:00, the order was changed to gather in Arbusov - Abakusc no. 2 - Alexejevo Losovskaja, to organize a strongpoint, with particularly active defense to the west, especially in anti-tank, so to protect the left flank of the Divisions which, meanwhile, had to stand on the Tihaja.

The general scarcity of fuels determined the order to abandon some of the remaining artillery pieces, after they were rendered unusable.

The difficulty of the route increased the losses and in the evening remained only 4 pieces of 75/27 of the 8<sup>th</sup> Artillery. The extra gunners were constituted into a reinforcement units.

#### SECTOR OF THE GERMAN XXIX ARMY CORPS (unit in withdraw).

#### *Torino Division.*

He had also received the order to set himself up on Tihaja, reaching Meskof with a move in successive echelons, passing through

for Kalminkof and sending the withdraw order to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri regiment, deployed to his right and isolated from the Command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division.

At 21:30 the order was changed by the Command of the XXIX German Corps in order to continue southwest withdraw.

At 24:00, the telephone connection with the XXIX Corps Command was interrupted and could not be held by radio because the German liaison officer, on his own initiative, for having heard that enemy elements were behind the Division, had arbitrarily destroyed the only station enabled to maintain that connection.

The withdrawing forces destroyed two enemy tanks in the Mankovo Kalitvenskaja area.

### *3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division.*

The units assigned to reinforce the Division had not come. At dawn the enemy attacked in force, preventing a counterattack set up by the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri. Enemy units were able to penetrate the Tihaja valley, while the command of the XXIX Corps ordered to keep the Don line, when, with infantry and tanks, the enemy attacked Meskof in the rear of the Division.

The barrier of the Tihaja valley was attempted, but links to the left of the Division were interrupted.

At 14:00 the Command of the XXIX Corps ordered the withdraw on the line of Tihaja, between Meskof and Provalskij. The withdraw order had to be transmitted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri via the *Torino* Division's Command, which assumed the regiment to its dependencies.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri was isolated from the rest of the Division. It occupied on the Don a sector of 22 kilometers and had, as a sector reserve, only two reinforcement companies, one of which included a platoon of health-care soldiers, and the other was Croatian. In the night it had to abandon Don's line under the rear guard echelon's protection and stand in the Tihaja valley, making contact with Torino's left at Meskov. They had scarcity of weapons, abandoned in the previous days fighting, and ammunition, no longer supplied. The artillery had to destroy their pieces for lack of fuel.

In the afternoon the Division Command, the Health Section, two Field Hospitals and a Surgical Section,



Substance Section, the Bakers Squad, the postal division, the motor pool and the Fuel and Lubricants Section had been almost completely destroyed by two Soviet tank attacks.

At 24:00 no news had yet arrived on the withdraw of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri and the Croatian Legion, while the threat of enemy armored vehicles on the far side of the Division came from the north and west. At the same time the order of the XXIX German Corps came not to stop on the Tihaja line, but to go south towards Kasciari, because the Meskof - Diogtevo road was held by two Soviet armored Corps. After this communication, the connection with the Command of the XXIX Corps was interrupted.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri column destroyed four Soviet tanks.

#### *Sforzesca Division.*

As the last withdraw movements ordered by the XXIX Corps had been carried out since the previous day, at 23:00 another order came that the Division, already overwhelmed by the wings of numerous armored enemy vehicles, should no longer be deployed on the Tcir , but break south, towards Nizne Boliscinskoj, about sixty kilometers away. Fuel shortages forced them to abandon the artillery tractors due to their high consumption, replacing them with lorries. Later, due to the lack of fuel in the lorries, many pieces were destroyed before being abandoned.

#### DECEMBER 20

There were no significant events in the Army sector garrisoned by the Alpine Army Corps and XXIV Armored at Golaja.

In the southern sector, the planned withdraw movements towards the south were carried out to save as much force from the enemy as possible.

The Command of the Army Group "B", probably still animated by the hope of defending the Rossosc - Millerovo railway (which supplied the Don Army Group), was to implement a defense of the heights of Losovenka, Losovaja and Tcir valleys on the line

hill 230 (East of Tatarski) - hill 206 (10 km south of Meskof) - Verhnij Cirski - Napolof - Gracev. It therefore canceled a withdraw order given by the XXIX Corps and returned its Grande Units that had passed those positions. But the unfavorable performance of the operations at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army made the project unsuitable.

Furthermore, he had arraigned that the *Pasubio* Division, as well as the 298<sup>th</sup>, passed on to the dependencies of the German XXIX Army Corps.

#### THE FRONT OF THE ALPINE ARMY CORPS.

In the right sector, held by the *Cuneense* Division, the last forces of the *Cosseria* Division (II and III/89<sup>TH</sup>), reduced to a handful of men without ammunition, with few automatic weapons, joining the ninth day of continuous combat, past to the dependencies of the *Cuneense* Division, they were made to descend on Loschtschina and Rossosc and started to Lisinovka, where they met with the rest of the *Cosseria*.

#### THE FRONT OF THE XXIV CORP.

To the south of the Alpine Corps, between Novo Kalitva and Taly, the line was almost continuous and there were no special actions under way on that front.

#### SECTORS OF THE GERMAN XXXV AND XXIX ARMY CORPS.

All the units had been withdrawn out on the previous day.

In the western part of the sector, the enemy went southward, reaching Diogtevo with their own armor.

The next day, the next enemy units came from the south (in the area of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army), along the Astakof - Kasciari - Olchovj Rog line. This was followed by the encirclement of the two Army Corps.

The Grande Units' withdraw movements from the defensive positions on the Don were first executed on a broad front, countering the corresponding advance of the enemy; then it was in columns that moved on one or more routes, as allowed by the events of the battle between the opposing infantry and the actions of the enemy tanks on the ground.

This situation determined a different form of withdrawal for each of the battened Divisions.

Some columns were able to remain united, some were hindered by the strong infiltrations of the enemy and the difficulties of movement, and another, in anxiety to find more easy paths, was fortuitously formed by men of various backgrounds.

Thus, two main retreat blocks were formed:

- *North block*: 298<sup>th</sup> German Division, Capizzi Group (*Ravenna* Division, *Pasubio* Division, *Torino* Division;

- *South Block*: Command of the XXIX German Army Corps, Command of the XXXV Army Corps, part of the *Pasubio* Division, various elements of the Corps, parts of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division, *Sforzesca* Division.

*298<sup>th</sup> Division and Capizzi group.*

They moved from the Radtsenskoye - Teresckova area to the Popovka - Makarof area.

*Pasubio Division.*

During the night, many of its elements, mostly of the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry, came to Popovka, with the *Torino* Division, following the fate of that Grande Unit.

The march for Popovka, Posdnjakof and Smirnovski ended at Scepilof, having covered a route of about 40 kilometers. With the total strength reduced to about 600 men and 4 pieces of the 9<sup>th</sup> battery of the 8<sup>th</sup> artillery regiment, the Division would have to stand in defense at Scepilof, being now virtually surrounded by the enemy.

With the Division was marching the Command of the XXXV Armed Corps

*Torino Division.*

At dawn, at Makarof, the 82<sup>nd</sup> Infantry with the reinforcements assigned to it when it was deployed on Don, reunited with the column of the Division.

The news received signaled the presence of armored forces of the enemy on the nearest roads. On those of the divisional column, the traffic jams caused by armored elements and

German motorists hindered the move, from Karaseev, to Popovka.

In this location, the Division also collected the column of the 81<sup>st</sup> Infantry and, thus formed, it joined a strong portion of the 298<sup>th</sup> Division, reinforced by the armored Haufmann group (27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division).

The presence of this group constituted a guarantee of support in the withdraw and offered the possibility of radio-telegraph connections; therefore the Division Commander decided to accede to the German request of 1,000 liters of fuel, which was taken from the Italian means, at the cost of further sacrificing available trucks and artillery.

By 11:00 Popovka was attacked by enemy tanks but they were rejected. The *Torino* was entrusted with the task of forming a rearguard. This task began at 22:30, after the departure of other forces.

The march was taking place with ordinary security measures, but was hindered by disorder brought about by heterogeneous elements, men, vehicles, carriages and sleds that could not be stopped by checkpoints, given the absence of mandatory passages.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division.*

During the whole day it was not possible to get connected with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri, with the 120<sup>th</sup> artillery, with the Croatian Legion and with the reinforcement means assigned to these units.

In the early hours of the evening, the Division Command managed to connect with the remains of the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri and the II/120<sup>th</sup> artillery, moving from Makeievka to Popovka,

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri, with the reinforcement units, found the enemy already heavily settled in Meskof. To dislodge him from the positions he occupied, the Croatian Legion and the XX and XVIII Bersaglieri Battalion engaged in combat. An important summit was once conquered and lost. At the beginning of the night the attack was suspended and the column withdrew over to Kalmikof, so not to spend the cold night on the ice.

*Sforzesca Division.*

In the early hours of the morning, the entire divisional column reached the Tcir line and went south, according to the order received by the Command of the XXIX Corps.

An enemy air bombardment caused considerable losses.

When it arrived at Popovka at 10:00, the column was reached by a counter order of the XXIX Corps, so he was forced to return to the Tcir and take position without finding a lateral link.

In the evening, that deployment was attacked on two sides by the enemy, which was rejected who suffering heavy losses in men and the destruction of four tanks.

During the night another action of armored units broke through the front of the 62<sup>nd</sup> German Division (Don Army Group), reaching Kamenka, where elements of *Sforzesca's* artillery repelled them, destroying three more tanks and inflicting loss of men.

## 21 DECEMBER

The Command of the Army Group "B", in the face of the apparent impossibility of carrying out the resistance order on the line indicated on the previous day, introduced new provisions aimed at:

- returning units to the Kalitva line (25) - Diogtevo - Verhnij Makejevka - Verhnij Grekovo, still eligible to cover the left flank of the Don Army Group;
- eliminate, with the withdrawn units and others in the process of going to Millerovo, the enemy units that came to Diogtevo.

The deployment of the Army on that day, depending on the various situations, could be considered so articulated:

- *northern deployment*, with an almost continuous front, held by:
  - Alpine Corps, on the old positions from Bielogorje to Staro Kalitva;
  - XXIV Armored Corps, from Novo Kalitva to Golaja, with:
    - 385<sup>th</sup> Division, from Novo Kalitva to Kriniscnaja (including *Julia* intervention group);
    - Fegelein group, from Pervomajsk to Atamanski;
    - remains of the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division in the area of Kosj;
    - 387<sup>th</sup> Division, between Lissenkovo and Golaja;
    - *Julia* Division, in the second eschlon in area of Dubravka - Grigorjevka;

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(25) Another stream of similar names, but not to be confused with Tciornaja Kalitva, the southern limit of the Alpine Corps sector.

- *Central sector*, between Kantemirovka and Diogtevo, defended by interlocked forces of varying consistency and of different nationalities located in Malcevskaja, Tcertkovo, Gartmiscevska, Buhaievka and, more retarded, in Belovodsk;

- *the southern sector*, between Diogtevo and Verhnij Grekovo, where were located the Command of the XXXV Army Corps and the units under the German XXIX Corps: Divisions *Pasubio*, *Torino*, 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere*, *Sforzesca* and 298<sup>th</sup> Germans, all on the way to the Tcertkovo - Diogtevo - Verhnij Makejevka area. At Millerovo, with other German minor units, was in attendance at the 3<sup>rd</sup> German Alpine Division, which was to cooperate with the 298<sup>th</sup> against the Soviet forces of Diogtevo.

The frontal pressure exerted by the enemy units, especially during the breakage of the front, was somewhat diminished due to the heavy losses they inflicted by the defense in previous days.

The enemy tended to exert his action with armored and motorized forces, between the withdrawing units, favored by the open spaces determined in the central and the south deployment.

#### *298<sup>th</sup> German Division.*

He had always been united to the Capizzi group of *Ravenna*, and had also blocked with the *Torino* Division.

After a tiring night march, at dawn it reached Posdnjakof, where it found the strength to overcome the Tihaja. At this location, at 07:00, *Torino* rearguard was simultaneously attacked by two battalions supported by tanks from the northwest and the southeast.

By 09:30, now on the right bank of Tihaja, the column was again attacked by infantry, while the tanks surrounded the margins as in a carousel movement.

In the afternoon hours, the enemy prevented the column from being set up on a hill, which the 298<sup>th</sup> had to attack, with the competition of Italian units. The *Torino*, on the other hand, was attacked; to bypass the enemy positions, the column came to Arbusov, stopping for the night.

*Pasubio Division.*

In the night on the 21<sup>st</sup>, in order to escape the surrounding enemy forces, the march was started in the south direction, preceded by the exploration, carried by horse-drawn elements, with houses drawn from the carriages. The movement was hampered by a clash with the enemy at Olchovski (26).

A new clash at 07:00 was held at Tihomirovski, where the Italians had the best against a Russian motorized column, which retired after considerable losses.

By 08:30, the column came to Verhnij Makejevka, joined with the column of the *Sforzesca* Division.

*Torino Division.*

In the night the units proceeded in order on Posdnjakof. The difficulties of the itinerary, which were partially off the tracks, required the abandonment of part of the vehicles and artillery. About 07:00, about two Soviet battalions, one from the northwest and one from the south-east, attacked the column, which reacted with artillery and with a violent counterattack of the III/81<sup>st</sup> infantry. To this move the enemy he responded with the intervention of tanks, causing considerable losses, only at 09:00 the movement could be resumed through the settlements of Posdnjakof and Ticho Sciuravskaja. To the west of Smirnovskij a new enemy barrier was broken after an hour and a half of struggle, but, while the head of the column was fighting to open the way, the rearguard was also attacked and the Arbusov basin could only be reached at 20:00.

In this location, the *Torino* arrived deploying in all three pieces of 75/27 and four lorries. All the remaining heavy equipment and lorries were lost due to lack of fuel and the difficulty of running on snow and ice. It was necessary, by radio of the 298<sup>th</sup> German Division, to request an urgent supply by air.

*3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division.*

The Division's Command remained separate from the dependent units and, after two days during which it was unable to connect with any of them, reached Forschstadt, Donez, and later Voroscilovgrad.

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(26) In it, General Adriano Perrod, Commander of the Artillery of the XXXV Corps - CSIR.

At dawn, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri Command decided to organize itself in defense at Kalmikof, where it had spent the night. Before the deployment began, the regiment was attacked from east and south by strong infantry contingents with mortars and small-scale artillery. The fight was split into short and isolated clashes. After harsh combat, the whole column was surrounded and captured.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri joined the column of the *Sforzesca* Division, which it shared their fate.

#### *Sforzesca Division.*

In the night, about fifteen tanks attacked Popovka and six of them were destroyed, while a unit of carabinieri repelled the infantry that accompanied them. Meanwhile, the infantry regiments received the order to gather at Verhnij Cirski to resume the southward swing, passing from the Tcir valley to that of Jablonovaja.

During the execution of the movements the left flank of the 53<sup>rd</sup> infantry was strongly attacked by tanks at 18:30. The combat lasted about two hours, with severe losses on both sides.

The march with the security measures had just begun at about 23:00 when a new and stronger attack of armored vehicles on the head and flanks of the column separated the avant-garde (I/53<sup>rd</sup>), which could however come out from the encirclement, after a fierce fight and after destroying 6 tanks. The bulk of the column (54<sup>th</sup> infantry) remained closed in the enemy's vice, and could not be rescued by the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri, which was attacked and rejected by the Russian tanks.

At Verhnij Makejevka, where the Division Command was located, the Commander of the XXXV Army Corps arrived, with elements of his Command and the Command of the *Pasubio* Division, with elements of the 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry.

In the night, the column, disengaged from the enemy, moving to Kjevskoje.

#### 21 - 22 DECEMBER

On the day of 21 and 22 December, while on the northern front of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army (Alpine Corps and XXIV Armored) there was an easing of the pressure of the enemy; in the southern sector



the action of Soviet armored and motorized units made any attempt to rebuild a front impossible by the units of the XXXV - CSIR and XXIX German Army Corps.

The movements of the two Great Units they ceased to have tactical purposes for exhaustion of the operational capabilities of the units. They had suffered very serious losses and were almost free from armaments, ammunition, fuel, and little supply of food, some of which were whipped up only for the most pressing need.

#### D) RECONSTITUTION OF A DEFENSIVE LINE

(DECEMBER 23 - JANUARY 8)

(see Drawing No. 40)

The Command of the Army Group "B", on the day of December 23, changed the deployment of its right wing, assigning the southern part to the Fretter Pico group (XXX German Army Corps) and significantly shrinking the breadth of the sector entrusted to the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian army, giving it the main task "*of hindering and delaying as far as possible an advance of additional enemy forces beyond the railway line*" Rossosc - Millerovo and "*defend in a decisive way*" the front on the Don held by the Italian Alpine Corps up to Novo Kalitva and the German XXIV Armored Army Corps from Novo Kalitva to Golaja. On that stretch were the *Julia* Division, 385<sup>th</sup> German, Fegelein group, German 27<sup>th</sup> Armored and German 387<sup>th</sup>.

To the south of Golaja, however, not all of the territory had been abandoned to the enemy, because in the towns of Bugajevka, Gartmischevka and Tcertkovo, three isolated Italian garrisons had been operating to counteract the advancement of the opposing forces, covering the left flank of the Fretter Pico group engaged in offensive actions against Diogtevo.

The Army Command had to perform the task they received, even though they did not have the following:

- of the II Corps, withdrawn from the front and being reorganized in the areas of Voroscilovgrad (*Ravenna* Division) and Rossosc (*Cosseria* Division);
- XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, with the Divisions *Sforzesca*, *Pasubio*, *Torino* and 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere*, all left out of the new.

the southern limit of the sector and who were struggling back to Donez.

However, the 19<sup>th</sup> German Armored Division was on its way to the right of the XXIV Armored Corps, remaining in the direct dependency of the Army Command. Some of its elements had been guards on the well-known railway line, and when the arrival of the other forces had been completed, the entire Great Unit would cooperate with the new advance eastward.

All German Armed Forces Commanders were issued their orders on the day of the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

The *Julia* Alpine Division - as we have just said - had sent its intervention group to the II Army Corps by truck on 18 December.

The two battalions *L'Aquila* and *Tolmezzo*, with the reinforcement units, had taken a position south of Tivornaja Kalitva, between Novo Melniza and Ivanovka (excluding), prolonging south of the line held by *Cuneense*, joining right with the 385<sup>th</sup> Division German.

Those positions had been joined by the battalion *Monte Cervino*, already very worn out.

The other units of *Julia*, as soon as they were replaced in the previous lineup, during the days of 19, 20 and 21 they had made the not easy transfer on foot, marching close to the positions of the *Cuneense*.

Already on the 20<sup>th</sup> the *L'Aquila* battalion, of the intervention group, deployed between the quadrilateral of Selenj Jar and Ivanovka, rejected the enemy's exploration elements.

On the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> an attack sprang from two battalions of the 352<sup>nd</sup> Soviet Division had also been rejected by the same *L'Aquila* battalion.

With equal forces at the dawn of 22<sup>nd</sup>, the attack was again attempted repeatedly. The entire Division was now deployed and could launch an immediate counterattack, backed by only four German tanks. By 15:00 the situation had been re-established.

At 10:00 or so, a little further north, the enemy moved to attack the *Tolmezzo* battalion. Rejected, renewed the attempt after two hours, with two battalions of the 167<sup>th</sup> Division again rebuffed, was forced to interrupt the action at 15:00 with severe losses.

On December 23, there were no important actions.

On December 24, the *Julia* intervention team was dissolved.

At 05:15, the enemy attacked the *Val Cismon* battalion, who, with the aid of five German assault guns, counterattacked the opponent beyond his starting positions, capturing prisoners, weapons and materials.

Towards 09:30 on the same day, the *Vicenza* battalion, backed by six German tanks, counter attacked the right flank of a large Soviet unit threatening Kriniscnaja in the sector of the 385<sup>th</sup> German Division. The Russians' action was cut off with serious losses.

At 19:00, the *Tolmezzo* battalion was again attacked by two Soviet battalions, after a brief and violent firefight, during a swirling snowstorm flying in front of the alpine slopes, reducing the view. This attack was also rejected, with the *Cuneense* artillery assistance. The captives taken claimed that Russian action had the purpose of the town of Komarof.

The Christmas day was spent relatively quiet.

At 03:00 on 26 December, the Soviets attacked the front of the battalions *Tolmezzo* and *Val Cismon*. By 07:00, emphasized the efforts of the *Val Cismon*, getting partial successes, canceled by an immediate counterattack supported by a platoon of German tanks. The commander of the XXIV German Corps, expressing his satisfaction, extended to the artillery that had supported the action (*Conegliano* group, the *Val Piave* and XXIII/2<sup>nd</sup> of 105/28), calling the alpine “*very aggressive in the attack*”.

The losses were huge both on the one side and on the other, for the Italian one aggravated by freezing (64 in only the 59<sup>th</sup> company of the *Vicenza* battalion).

The fight continued on the same ground in the days of 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, in an alternation of losses and recaptures of positions which, however, at the evening of 28<sup>th</sup> were all in Italian hand. The freezing losses alone on the 28<sup>th</sup> amounted to 103.

On the night of the 29<sup>th</sup> and the following day, the online companies were replaced by other *Vicenza* and *Val Cismon* battalions.

The wondrous behavior of the entire Division was cited in the German Grand-Head Quarter General's war bulletin: “*In the battles of the great Don's bend, the Julian Alps Division was particularly distinguished*”.

At dawn on December 30, after long artillery preparation and with the support of 25 tanks, the enemy again attacked the front of the *Tolmezzo* battalion (6<sup>th</sup> company), pointing to the Novo Kalitva – Komarof roadway. Contained in the first phase from

precise fire of automatic weapons and artillery, the attack was resumed at about 06:30 with wide support of artillery and subsequent waves always rejected. At 08:00 the Russians were forced to fall back in disorder.

Meanwhile, the enemy operation extended to the south against the positions held by the 385<sup>th</sup> Division (Cividale heights). Even the *Tolmezzo* battalion and the Italian artillery aided against the defensive action of the Germans, but the enemy managed to conquer the position. It then intervened to counterattack with the *Gemona* Battalion that restored the situation. The fight lasted for the whole day on positions won and lost many times.

Even the positions of the 9<sup>th</sup> Alpine (*Vicenza* battalion), on the road to Deresovatka - Selenj Jar, were violently attacked by the early hours of the morning, by about two Soviet battalions. At 07:30, there appeared on the battlefield, in support of the Soviet infantry, even tanks, some heavy. In close combat, four of them were knocked out of combat.

Towards 10:00, as the situation had become critical also on the front of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division, a German air strike was called at 11:45 to three successive waves of three aircraft that bombed and strafed the enemy forces.

A counterattack from the 59<sup>th</sup> company of the *Vicenza* battalion south of Selenj Jar's crossroads, supported by 4 assault guns and 6 German tanks, was able to repel the enemy after a long struggle; at 18:00 the situation was re-established.

Suspended for a few hours at night, the fight reappeared on December 31<sup>st</sup> before dawn, in the same direction of the previous day, and the enemy attacked two columns (each about a battalion) supported by 18 tanks.

The defense, in which the men of the III mixed engineers battalion had also been included, after a first enemy victory, contained the attack and, with a quick counterattack, at 08:40 re-established the situation by inflicting the enemy heavy losses on men and tanks. An offensive Soviet return at 12:45 was again rejected.

On 1, 2 and 3 January, there was no major activity in the sector.

Intensive logistics activity for supporting the physical resistance of combatants through extraordinary distributions of comfort food, wool stockings, coats with fur, camouflage coats. The Germans aided with the distribution of felt footwear, sent to pick up in the far to the rear as Karkov and Poltava.

The activity of the Alpine was also devoted to the refinement of defensive works and the network of connections on days of rest.

On the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> January the combat was carried out essentially for the possession of the "Cividale heights" in the German sector.

They participated in the fight on the 4<sup>th</sup>, first the 20<sup>th</sup> company of the *Cividale* Battalion, which was on its own initiative; then the 16<sup>th</sup>, which aroused the admired applause of the Germans for defying of the demonstrable danger. On the actions also intervened the artillery of *Cuneense*. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, 08:30, enemy infiltrations of the heights forced to a temporary abandonment of it, but the situation was restored in three hours. A new enemy attack was rejected at 14:00. At 17:00, after a new attack, the height returned to the enemy.

At 08:30 on the 6<sup>th</sup> the 76<sup>th</sup> company (*Cividale* Battalion), assisted by a platoon and some German tanks, returned to the position by capturing 45 prisoners. The *Cividale* Battalion between dead and wounded had lost 300 men.

The enemy, well-trying, suspended the action for a few days.

The Command of the Army Group "B" had confirmed to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army the order to resist in any way the enemy advance, articulating the actions according to the situation of each stretch of the front:

- rigid resistance to the intact positions of the Alpine Corps up to Novo Kalitva, and to those much less substantial than the XXIV Armored Army Corps, between Novo Kalitva and Golaja;

- timely and delayed resistance to the south of Golaja to Michailo Aleksandrovskji, action to be made more and more static and consistent with the arrival of new forces (19<sup>th</sup> Armored Division) in the Starobelsk - Belovodsk - Novo Markovka area, which began on 24 December.

The need to contact the right with the Fretter Pico group, to unlock the Italian and German forces besieged in Tcertkovo, and the least impulsive, but not remote, of rejecting the adversary towards Don, did not allow the use of the 19<sup>th</sup> Division even to extend the occupation, as it would have been useful, to the north, to align with the right wing of the XXIV Corps

and to bridge the gap between Golaja and Novo Markovka, about 40 km wide.

Since the German Command found it necessary to reconstitute a continuous line, the task was assumed by the XXIV Corps.

This, after the arrival of *Julia*, of the *Fegelein* Group and of the 387<sup>th</sup> Division, had not received new forces, while in opposition to the Soviet advance had seen the existing ones shrinking. To be able to extend its line to the south, it had to necessarily thin out the deployment in place. On December 26, arrived at Michailovka, in the days 27 and 28 it was still moving to Vissotscinof, on the parallel of Kantemirovka, halving the gap, which still remained about 20 kilometers wide.

A similar emptiness in the deployment still allowed the enemy to operate on the rear of the two sections, leaving the Valuijki route to the north behind the Alpine Army Corps, while to the south there was a similar threat to the Fretter Pico group.

The Army Command presented the dangerous situation to the Command of the Army Group "B" (*Document No. 107*) and directly, by the modest limitation of its possibilities, by moving the remaining forces of the *Cosseria*, in reorganization, from the south - west area of Rossosc to the Rovenki area.

The Army Command, however, relying more on the alleged intentions of the enemy than on the forces at his disposal, decided to lighten the deployment of the XXIV Corps, subtracting the modestly residual forces of the 27<sup>th</sup> Armor (already reduced by the Haufmann group's retreat with the 298<sup>th</sup> Division). This Grande Unit, nominally "armored", ceased to be in practice receiving two incomplete "training regiments" in preparation for warfare and equipment, and would also retain their organic dependence on their original "Division formation" (*Document n. 108*). This was another symptom of the grave situation in which the German Army was reduced.

The 27<sup>th</sup> Division, so reconstituted, took a position south of Vissotscinof, while the right side of the XXIV Corps was moved south to the Kriniza - Nikolskoje - Tisckovka - Peski line.

On December 28, the new deployment was in progress; the XXIV Armored Corps had thus fulfilled the task received. However, the units were tired, the sectors shrunk, the occupation south of Golaja only realized with over-distances, lacked reserves. In essence, higher orders had been executed but the situation on that front line was always precarious.

To the south of the XXIV Corp, the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored Division initially strengthened the strongpoints of Novo Markovka and Belovodsk, then extended its control to the south in the Derkul valley, giving protection to the Donez line and covering Voroscilovgrad together with the mining-industrial zone behind.

The Army Group Command, meanwhile, designed a joint action between the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored and the forces of the Tcertkovo garrison to give the enemy, penetration into the area of Voloscino (Fretter Pico sector), the feeling of being encircled. The Army Command suggested the difficulties of the operation, but the implementation of the project was equally attempted on December 29:

- The 19<sup>th</sup> Division reached only Strelzovka, in the Kamyscnaja valley, about 25 km from Tcertkovo;

- the besieged garrison made its push toward the west, progressing little; the direct connection, the supply of food and ammunition, the removal of sick and injured could not take place, either on that day or in a second attempt on January 1.

From December 29<sup>th</sup> to January 8<sup>th</sup>, the enemy was carrying out substantial attacks on the 19<sup>th</sup> Division in the Kamiscnaja valley, inflicting a heavy losses on it, as well as the besieged garrisons of Gartmiscevka and Tcertkovo were getting closer and closer.

#### E) CONTINUATION OF THE WITHDRAW (23 DECEMBER -JANUARY 16)

The units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army, which had been retired from the Don line since 19 December, formed two blocks of forces withdrawing over the same main routes:

- south block;
- north block.

The units of the II Corps were different, as stated below.

#### SOUTH BLOCK.

It had been constituting in Kijevskoj during the day of December 22, with elements of the most diverse origins, converged around the largest homogeneous unit of the *Sjorzesca*.

The most important unit that joined this Division was the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri regiment.

Instead, men from the II Corps, the XXXV -CSIR and the other Italian Divisions of the XXIX German Corps met and formed a *regimental formation*, called "Mazzocchi", by the name of the Commander of the 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry he kept the command. This new unit was made up of three battalions, named after the divisions from which most of the personnel came from:

The *Pasubio battalion* belonged to the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry and to twenty-one other units of the *Torino*, *Ravenna*, *Celere* Divisions, the XXXV Corps Command and other Army Corps and Army units and services;

- The *II Battalion Celere* (less than 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri) consisted of men from thirty-three units of the *Ravenna* and *Torino* Divisions, the Command of the XXXV Corps and other Army Corps and Army units and services;

- The *III battalion Siorzesca* included all the men belonging to the Division of the same name, not framed in their regiment or in the other minor units.

The battalions, first formed with three companies of three platoons, had to be brought to four companies each, distinguishing between personnel with individual armaments and what was lacking.

The regiment was endowed with the only 75/27 piece that could be saved from the 8<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment of the *Pasubio*, which had first been affixed to the surviving pieces of the 17<sup>th</sup> artillery of the *Siorzesca* and then returned to its Division.

During the day, enemy armored vehicles from Nizne Astachof were rejected. Two tanks had been destroyed.

On the night of December 23, the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment reinforced by the available artillery replaced a German group in the Nagolnaja valley in the west of Kievskoj, remaining in positions until the dusk the following day and fighting for the whole day.

The remaining units reached Annenskij, where, by command of the XXIX German Corps, they organized themselves to defend themselves against the enemy forces occupying the Nagolnaja valley. At Annenskij they could join the survivors of the 53<sup>rd</sup> infantry.



At 05:00 on 24 December the column was set in motion on Krasnojarsk, occupied by the force at 20:00 by the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri, who drove out the occupying Soviet forces. The temperature had dropped to -35°, aggravated by a strong windstorm.

The march ended at 05:00 on Christmas day.

During the stop, emptied the gasoline tanks, all the vehicles that were now useless were burned out by fire; the fuel recovered was destined for vehicles used to tow a few surviving artillery or to transport wounded and frozen.

The planned move to Nizne Patmos was canceled as the road was barred by the enemy. It was therefore necessary to lengthen the itinerary with an eastward change.

The movement was resumed at 03:00 on December 26, with a temperature of -38°. At 12:00, three German planes bombed the column by mistake, causing heavy losses. The staging town, Nizne Petrovskij, was occupied at 15:00, after two hours of fighting.

In the afternoon of December 27, a short shift to the west was made, up to Nikolaevsky, to improve the housings, but as soon as the units were stationed, at 22:00, an order of the XXIX Corps ordered the resumption of the movement on Bolscioj Ternovyj in the Gnilaja valley. At midnight, in the storm, the march was started, disturbed, in the rear, by partisan attacks and, on the right flank, at 04:00 on December 28, by regular Soviet units.

At 05:30, when Bolscioj Ternovyj was only 3 kilometers away, a German plane sent a message to the column. It was a 1:300,000 map, with the markings of a strong enemy occupation at Bolscioj Ternovyj and indicating a new itinerary up to Skassirskaja, occupied by German forces.

However, it would have covered a new 40 km stretch, in addition to the 35 newly wounded, bringing the total distance to 75 kilometers without intermediate stops outside the roadway in the described environmental conditions.

Absolute fuel shortage caused a further sacrifice of motor vehicles and guns.

Soviet tanks attacked the column head and tail and three of them were destroyed by the little artillery that remained.

The loss of men, for exhaustion and freezing, multiplied.

At midnight on the 28<sup>th</sup> it was finally reached the German deployment. Flocking to the gates to reach

salvation and rest sooner, made some men out of the established limits and who became victims of the defending minefields.

The survivors gathered in Michajlovskij - Nadeshovka area, and stayed there for the entire day of the 29<sup>th</sup>.

On the morning of December 30, the movement seemed to take place on a regular basis when a batch of Soviet tanks fell on Romanian units united to the Italian column. The Italian units that were not yet in line had to take emergency measures to stop the messy flow of the numerous Romanian vehicles and could even destroy three enemy tanks.

The movement was resumed at dusk; at about 22:00 the column, now made up of only Italians, reached Gorodjanka and Jessa Ulof.

In this last resort, the Command of *Sforzesca* returned to the regiments the respective flags, previously withdrawn to ensure their preservation. In addition, the commander of the XXIX Corps, General von Obstfelder, went to greet the Italian units who left the German Grande Unit and issued a Day of Commendation and Thanksgiving (*Document 109*)

On January 1, the column moved to Ust Provalskij, where it stayed for a day. The 3<sup>rd</sup> reached Forschstadt, on the Donez. Finally, the units were transported by rail to Rykovo, where they gathered on January 5<sup>th</sup>.

#### NORTH BLOCK.

Throughout the day of December 22, the Soviet units occupied the Arbusov basin, where the Italian units of the *Torino* Division, of the Capizzi group, had collected part of the *Pasubio* and the Germans of the 298<sup>th</sup> Division.

In the night the enemy pressed the besieged units by focusing on the fire of automatic weapons, mortars, rocket launchers and machine guns on the easy target of men in the open; the houses had all been occupied by the Germans, who arrived first.

Also during the night, the units were reorganized, gathering those who were able to fight, while they conducted a counter assault, dampening the aggression of the enemy.

The German Command decided to carry out at 07:00 an action aimed at removing the enemies hold. The bulk of the

Italian units overtook the attacking Germans in action, burst into the Soviet lines and repulsed them, achieving the purpose of the operation.

Many prisoners, weapons and ammunition were captured, but many were among the Italian attacker's dead and the injured, who had to be kept outdoors for the difficulties of the German 298<sup>th</sup> to cede, in part, the buildings they occupy.

The fire of the enemy continued, causing other heavy losses.

In the evening the German Command ordered the abandonment of the lines reached in the morning by the Italians.

On 23 *December*, given the situation, the *Torino* commander ordered the incineration of regimental flags to avoid possible capture.

The violence of enemy fire action grew day by day with the use of more powerful guns.

The reorganization operations aimed at giving the unit formations the highest possible organicity, and thus better performance, were disturbed by the peremptory German demand for immediate training of the fourteen Italian unit formations of about 100 men to be used in the defense of the areas commanded by the Italian Generals Capizzi (*Ravenna*) and Rossi (*Torino*).

In the evening, all Italian commanders were invited to gather at the Command of the 298<sup>th</sup>, to give greater readiness for decisions and intervention to their unit leadership.

In the early hours of the night the orders for the breakout of the encirclement and the transfer to the stronghold of Tcertkovo were issued. The wounded and the frozen able to march followed the column, the others were transported on the available sleds or the only lorry for which gas was found; the non-transportable ones were left in place, entrusted with the sense of human solidarity of the enemy.

At 23:30 the movement began. The Soviets attacked the Italian rearguard, but this kept them away from the column. The combat lasted until dawn on *December 24*, and some combat units could no longer reach the column.

The temperature had dropped to -40° and the Italian soldiers were marching fast again because the required aerial supplies were not available, nor the command of the German 298<sup>th</sup> Division,

alongside which they also fought the Italian units, had ceded part of their rations.

The night march, thanks to the Italian retrograde, allowed the column to escape from the enemy, following an open country route.

At 08:00 on 24 *December*, Sidorovka was reached, at 11:00 Gushev. About 5 kilometers from Mankovo Kalitvinskaja, the column was diverted by strong enemy resistance that could not be overcome. The march had to be reversed to the south for Poltavka (14:00) - Ivanovka - Chodokov, advancing in high snow, with stiff temperature and fog.

Many of the frozen ones who, stopping to rest, passed from torpor to death for sobering. Partisans armed with automatic weapons and quick-throw pieces tended to cling to the column.

At 07:00 on *December 25*, at Sceptukovka, the column passed the railroad station so until 13:00, but was disturbed by aerial bombing.

As the movement began, the march became more and more painful; many soldiers were left behind, some with signs of mental alienation, caused by fatigue, cold, obsessive obscene landscape, and prolonged fasting.

At 22:00, the head of the column reached Tcertkovo, where the commander of the Italian Defense Forces was distributing caravans and securing indoor enclosures. The influx of delayed people continued for the entire day of *December 26<sup>th</sup>*.

From the examination of the situation, immediately conducted with the local and the German command, it turned out that the road to the west on Belovodsk was in possession of the enemy and that the movement could not be continued.

On *December 27*, they were asked by the Army Command, again "using the radio of the 298<sup>th</sup> Division, sending medicines, airing lifting the most seriously wounded and by vehicle (as soon as the street was opened) of 2,000 wounded and fewer frozen. There was also the presence of an Army Command officer to find out the severity of the situation and make arrangements to clear the injured and sick.

The necessary reorganization of the units proved impossible, as the ever-vigilant enemy did not allow them to gather outside. The fire of artillery, mortars and rocket launchers caused losses among men and the destruction of homes.

The Italian units were assigned to the defense of the eastern sector adjacent to their huts.

On *December 28*, an Italian plane carried out a launch of food, medicine and light weapons ammunition.

In the afternoon of *December 29*, the Air Force Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, General Pezzi, and Colonel Bocchetti were arriving by air, to whom the situation was being exposed. On the return journey, the aircraft went missing.

On *30 December*, the besieging enemy forces received reinforcements and supplies.

On *31 December*, the Italian hospital was opened in the premises of a school. There were over 1,100 more serious injuries, for which more than 700 injured workers were involved.

The Italian force present in Tcertkovo was 7,000 men, of whom 3,800 wounded and frozen.

On 1 January the enemy's ground bombardments continued. The Germans returned to the Italian garrison the Italian warehouses of that logistic center, which had undergone extensive food removals. However, enough biscuits was found for 40 days for the entire block of travel, pasta and rice for 30, canned meat for 10; very little fat.

Meanwhile, the forces of the 19<sup>th</sup> German Armored Division, sent to unlock Tcertkovo, had been stopped at 14 kilometers by a large presence of the enemy, while bad weather prevented the intervention of German planes to break that resistance.

On the days of 2 and 3 *January* there were no special events.

On *January 4*, 298<sup>th</sup> Division took action to join the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored, came close to it, but was rejected by a counter-attack of the Russians, while the Italian forces, attached to their positions, reacted vigorously.

After an intense night bombardment, in the morning of *January 5* an attack of the enemy, directed partially against the Italian sector, was rejected with strong losses to the attackers. Incendiary projectiles caused the destruction of much of the clothing and equipment store. An supply air drop to the Italians was lost, because it was pushed by the wind into enemy lines.

New and Soviet Soviet attack on *January 7<sup>th</sup>*; enemy patrols, infiltration into the village, were eliminated.

During a report held on *January 8* by the Commander of the 298<sup>th</sup> Division it was:

- The 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command the ordered resistance to the bitter end;
- the German losses were considerable;
- the men's assistance was necessary for the Germans, while the lack of armaments and ammunition made it impossible to reorganize many Italian units. Previous sporadic cases had already yielded positive results and 300 Italian soldiers accepted the proposal to join the German units.

During the entire day of *January* 9, the enemy developed continuous attacks, sustained by intense bombings and 10 tanks, of which 8 were destroyed.

The systematic destruction of houses made it more difficult to find suitable housing. High losses, the critical situation of the sick.

Of the 14,000 besieged (7,000 Italians and as many Germans), the combatants were reduced to 2,500 in all, lacking ammunition, while the food situation was desperate.

The strength of the enemy was considerably increased. Days from 10 to 13 *January* passed without any special events.

On the morning of *January* 14, it was announced that the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored Division would open a passage on the Strelzovka road to allow the outflow of the vehicles of the sick, followed by the whole garrison, but at 13:00 it was reduced to the fact that the road to salvation had to open the same besieged and wounded and frozen that could not be loaded on the sleds would have to be abandoned on the spot. The Italian wounded were 3,850 in total, of which about 1,000 could not walk, only two trucks available, the number of sleds was limited, allowing only a hundred nurses to be transported. No aid could be given by the Germans, and most of the sick, wounded and frozen, would remain in Tcertkovo.

At 20:00 on *January* 15<sup>th</sup>, took place the queuing of valid elements;

- *Torino* Division; 1,600 men;
- *Pasubio* Division; 2,000 men;
- Troops and Services of the XXXV Corps; 1,800 men;
- *Ravenna* and *Celere* unit; 400 men;
- Tcertkovo defense troops; 500 men.

Before the 298<sup>th</sup> Division, was able to break the encirclement, while the Italian column remained in the rear with the support of some German tanks.

The recent fall of snow made the night march difficult.

At the dawn of *January 16<sup>th</sup>* Losovskaja was reached, at Beresovo began an uninterrupted action of Soviet tanks, effectively countered and sometimes destroyed by German anti-tank. Aircraft "Stukas" gave their most valid assistance. The action of Russian heavy weapons of land also brought other difficulties. Strelzovka had to be circumvented at 4 pm to avoid Soviet forces and to put the column on the Belovodsk road, where, once the enemy had stopped, there remained only more to overcome the general difficulties of the environment.

At 22:00, the head of the Italian column reached Belovodsk and immediately began the clearance with the ambulances of the infirm to Starobelsk for the sorting on the health facilities of Voroscilovgrad and Kupjansk.

The arrival of the stragglers lasted for the whole night and most of the day on *January 17<sup>th</sup>*.

## II ARMY CORPS.

The Army Corps Command, from the 19<sup>th</sup>, had no more operational responsibilities, having to replenish its units in a zone other than that of Mitrofanovka, where it was located, too exposed to the events of the ongoing struggle.

On December 17<sup>th</sup>, the separation of a first block of forces from the *Ravenna* Division (Capizzi group) was formed, consisting mainly of units of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and reinforcement elements, flowing south-east and joining them to the 298<sup>th</sup> German Division, which it shared the fortunes in the double siege of Arbusov and Tcertkovo and in the sortie from the latter.

The events of December 19 in Kantemirovka determined, as we have seen, the disordered outflow from that city of most of the *Ravenna* Division, most of the 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the *Cosseria*, with their respective reinforcement elements.

The largest part of the forces of the *Cosseria* Division had been collected in Sofjevka, just west of the Rossosc - Millerovo railway, while the remains of the 89<sup>th</sup> Infantry, which remained in line until December 20, along with the 385<sup>th</sup> German Division, gathered in Loshatcina behind the right wing of the *Cuneena* Alpine Division.

In this situation, the Army Command decided that the II Army Corps Command left Mitrofanovka and, passing through Rossosc - Starobelsk, moved to Voroscilovgrad, reaching the major nucleus of its units, and then to the inventories, he devoted himself to the reconstitution of the units. The move, which began late in the night on December 20, was completed by the 21<sup>st</sup>.

### *The Cosseria Division*

Collected the Division Command at Sofjevka, a part of the 90<sup>th</sup> infantry, the 108<sup>th</sup> artillery (less a group), the engineer units and the services, gathered in Sofjevka, after the remains of the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry had gathered in Losistscina and after fought until December 20, next to the 385<sup>th</sup> Division, on December 23, the entire *Cosseria* moved to the Lisinovka - Jekaterinovka area, near Rossosc, where it stayed until 31 December, passing through the dependence of the Alpine Army Corps.

Between 1 and 5 January, operational requirements determined the division's move to the Rovenki-Beloluzkaja area, to protect the right side of the Alpine Corps, continuing the reorganization operations that had already begun.

From that area, for an aggravation of the situation on the front of the German XXIV Armored Army Corps, the Division, moved to the direct command of the Army Command, was started in the southwest direction to reach Izjum. From here, it then went northwest, starting a long walk of 1,300 kilometers, with temperatures sometimes falling below -40°, and actions always carried out in accordance with order and discipline. The route Karkov - Ahtyrka - Romny - Priluki - Neshin was traveled to Nova Belize in the Gomel (White Russia) area on 7 March. The Division then joined the II Army Corps Command and the *Ravenna* Division.

### *The Ravenna division.*

The units of the Division, which arrived in Voroscilovgrad between 19 and 21 December, they were immediately collected, subjected to a first reorganization, provided with equipment and armaments destroyed or lost in combat, and used to defend the bridges and the city, as will be mentioned later.



The Commander of the Division, after surrendering the defense of the Taly strongpoint to the German Andersen group, had picked up the units that had followed him to Valentinovka (4 kilometers south-east of Mitrofanovka) by the evening of 19 December; in all 1,200 men with 30 officers, 2 pieces of 105/28 and 20 trucks.

At that location, he dedicated the days of 20 and 21 December to a better organization of the units.

On the morning of December 22, he was warned, by elements of the German 387<sup>th</sup> Division, that a further advancement of the enemy made the situation precarious and received the order directly from the Army Command to move to Vorosilovgrad with the column under his orders, passing through Rossosc - Rovenki - Starobelsk - bridge of Vesselaja Gora.

F) DEFENSE OF VOROSILOVGRAD  
AND ANOTHER SECTOR ON THE DONEZ  
(22 DECEMBER - 24 JANUARY)  
(Drawing No 41)

The Command of the II Army Corps, who arrived in Vorosilovgrad on the night of December 22, learned about the local situation during the morning, issued the first orders for the defense of the two bridges, the stretch of river interposed to them and the city behind (*Document n. 110*), specifying immediately after that it would be a delivery to be performed without saving energy and sacrifices (*Document n. 111*).

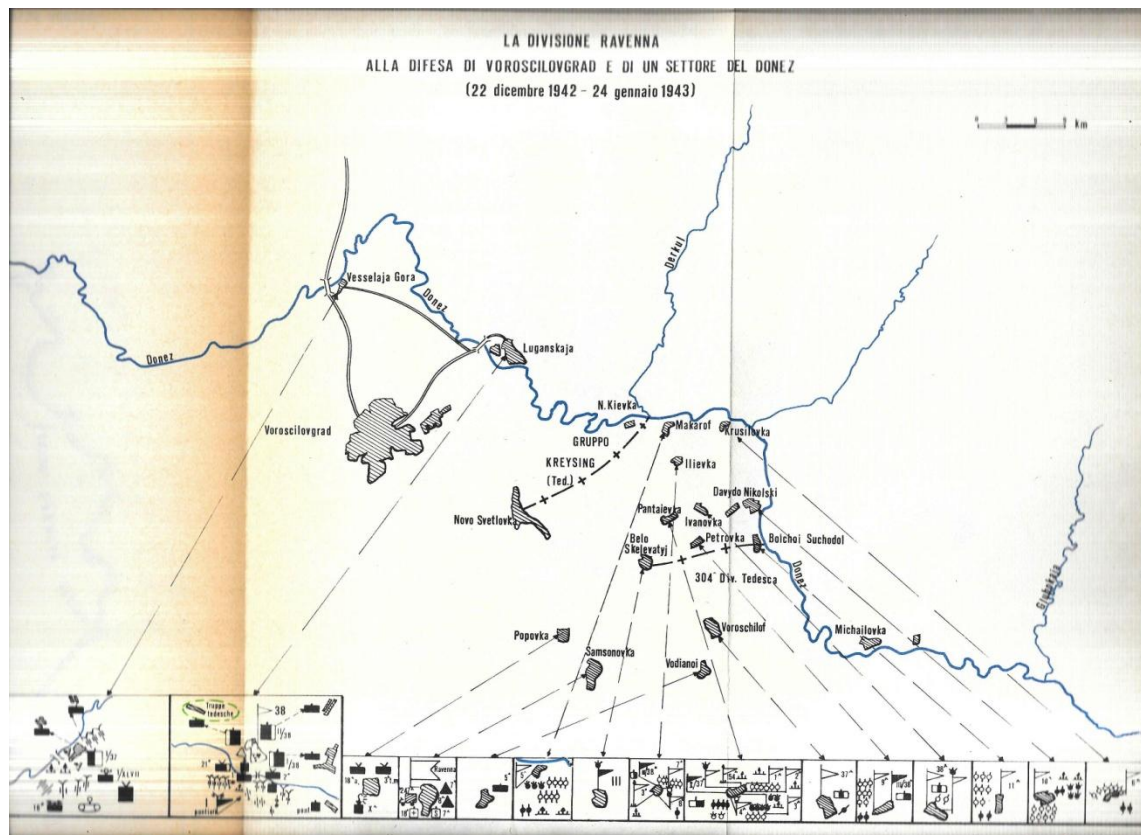
Meanwhile, with the affluence of Vorosilovgrad of the *Ravenna*'s units from Valentinovka, the Commander of this Division was assigned responsibility for defending the head of the bridge, separating it from the defense of the city.

The *Ravenna* was entrusted with the following tasks:

- the defense of the bridges and the river from every infiltration of enemy and in subordinate defense of the urban area of Vorosilovgrad and adjacency;
- the alimentation of the defense forces, first of all with the units of the Division itself, but also with others, drawn from any Italian unit;
- ordered clearing on the back of the units that can not be readily re-used, coordinating their movements with the needs of the Quarter Master.

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map 41



The 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command, on December 23, stated that defending the bridgehead was of great importance for future counter-offensive actions and that this task was paramount to others (*Document No. 112*). It also prescribed (*Document No. 113*), that the defense was aggressive, pushing its points against the advancing enemy infantry.

The Commander of the II Corps, aware that the morale of the units would be decisive in the clashes with an enemy enamored of the recent success, on 24 December invited the Commander of *Ravenna* to carry out every possible action because all the employees of each grade they would perform in the fulfillment of their duties, demonstrating that the tragedy between Don and Donez had not affected their combat ability. The Commander of *Ravenna* responded by ensuring that the moral command of the work had already been carried out, pointing out that in the negative episode of Kantemirovka not only were the units of the Division, but also other bodies and especially units of the services.

On the same day, the Commander of the II Corps could report to the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army (*Document No. 114*) on the consistency of the bridgehead defense, in which 4,084 men (official 124) and 33 artillery guns of various caliber from 20 to 105 mm.

The Command of the Army Group Section Fretter Pico, on December 24, informed the II Corps Command of its intention to transfer the Italian forces from the defense of the bridges of Voroscilovgrad to that of another branch of the Donez. General Zanghieri responded on December 25, announcing the limited possibilities of those units. However, as early as December 27, General Fretter Pico personally communicated to General Zanghieri the *Ravenna* movement orders (*Document No. 115*). At the end of the same day, the Command of the Army Group "B" issued its orders for the continuation of the battle between Don and Donez (*Document n. 116*).

On the evening of 30 December the *Ravenna* and the other Italian forces attached to it were replaced by the German Schramm group. The Division shifted to the operational dependencies of the Fretter Pico Army Section Group, to assume the defense of another sector.

Between January 1 and January 6, *Ravenna* executed the order and settled on the right bank of Donez, in the stretch between the confluence of Derkul and Michajlovka. The front was 45 km wide.

To the Division was assigned the following tasks:

- watch the right bank, occupy the dwellings and watch the intervals;
- preventing enemy infiltration with convergent actions departing from the occupied locations;
- stop pushes of isolated tanks;
- give depth to the defense, occupying rearward population centers.

The available combat forces consisted of three infantry battalions, one 20 mm anti-aircraft battery, one 75/27, one 100/17, two 105/28 pieces. However, with the exception of the latter two cannons from the Don, the batteries, armed with materials from the Quartermaster's warehouses also located in remote locations, could only take place on 13 January.

The deployment was carried out by occupying the left-hand side of Donez with one company each:

- II/38<sup>th</sup>: Makarof - Kruscilovka - Iljevka and Battalion Command at Iljevka;
- III/38<sup>th</sup>: Davjdo Nicholshij - Bolscioj Suchodol - Petrovka and Battalion Command in Petrovka;
- Command of the 38<sup>th</sup> infantry in Ivanovka;
- I/37<sup>th</sup>: Podgornoe - Popovka - Belenki - Malyi Suchodol and Battalion Command at Malyj Suchodol;
- Command of the 37th Infantry at Voroscilov.

The artillery was assigned per piece or per section reinforcing the occupation of the Makarof, Kruscilovka, Davjdo Nicholskij, Bolscioj Suchodol, Transiederei, Popovka.

At the time when the Division assumed the sector's responsibility, the bulk of the enemy was in the area between Millerovo and Donez, faced by the German 304<sup>th</sup> Division in retreat. But Soviet advanced objectives pushed to the northwestern countries and threatened the location of the other west side of Kamensk, on the right of the new *Ravenna* line.

Between January 6 and January 19, the Division sent over the river substantial reconnaissance items and began strengthening work in various dwellings and barrier of the river bank in anti-tank operation.

From information from various sources appeared the intention of the enemy to attack *Ravenna* in the stretch between the mouth

of the Derkul and Davjdo Nicholskij, while her infantry forces flourished in the Dubovoj area.

The link to the left was established only on the morning of 18 January by a German company from the Luganskaja - Nikolaievka area, following complaints filed by the Command of *Ravenna* to the Army Section Command.

In the early afternoon of January 18, a Russian deserter, presented at Makarof, reported that the mass of enemy forces in Dubovoj (1 rifle regiment reinforced by the mortar company, the machine gunner company, the anti-tank rifle company, 1 - 152 battery, 1 anti-tank battery of 45-mm) would be moved to Kruscilovka's attack the next day.

Recognitions sent confirm the presence of the enemy and its balance of possession across the area.

The defense situation, diluted on such a large front, did not allow to concentrate forces on the threatened direction Kruscilovka - Ivanovka. It was only possible to complete the destruction of the bridges on Donez, requiring the Army Section to allocate armored units for a push on the opponent's main core or at least for use as an element of maneuver.

The Army Section (Fretter Pico Group) replied that the inclusion of the 304<sup>th</sup> Division in the defense of Donez and the transfer to the *Ravenna* of a section of about 7 kilometers in front was expected, the Italian Division could replace with its forces the deployment.

During the daylight hours of January 19<sup>th</sup>, the enemy carried out violent artillery and mortar operations on Makarof, Kruscilovka and Iyevka. At dusk the Italian garrisons of Makarof and Kruscilovka were attacked by partisan formations. Finally, at 22:30 Soviet regular units began attacking Kruscilovka.

The Italian garrison (1 Rifle Company, 1 Mortar Company, 1 - 75/27 cannon section) resisted tenaciously. The Italian units sent to support, in turn attacked and encircled during the march, were able to liberate, containing the attack from Kruscilovka drawing close to Ivanovka.

At 04:00 on January 20, Kruscilovka's survivors counter-assaulted the overwhelming enemy forces, freed and opened the passage to Ivanovka. They, reorganized in a company of two only platoons, had begun in Iljevka to strengthen the garrison.

During the whole day, the enemy tried to spread from Kruscilovka south and west, but he was contained, while the

units slowly replaced by the 304<sup>th</sup> Division, together with others of artillerymen, they set up a rearward defense. Following higher orders, an attack was made with the 573<sup>rd</sup> Grenadier regiment (304<sup>th</sup> German Division), to be held on the 21<sup>st</sup> on the front Ivanovka - Davjdo Nicholskij in the direction of Kruscilovka. On the Italian side there was the III/38<sup>th</sup> artillery reinforced.

As preparations for the action were under way, at 20:00 on January 20, the enemy attacked Davjdo Nicholskij. It was counter-attacked and rejected beyond the Denez that same night by Italian and German forces.

During the fighting at Davjdo Nicholskij, shortly after midnight on January 20, the enemy, with the I and II/889<sup>th</sup>, reinforced by partisans, attacked the Italian company dispersed at Makarof and by 07:00 it totally submerged. Only few of the infantry could retreat to Iljevka.

The action prepared on Kruscilovka was canceled, in order to try to close the breach created and counteract on the threat by diverting the other forces deployed on the river.

At the same time, German unit intervention was required while resistance continued on the rearward positions.

At 04:00 on January 22, the enemy attacked from the east, north and west, the town of Iljevka, using two battalions reinforced by partisans. Iljevka was surrounded and sacrificed most of the III/38<sup>th</sup>, including its commander, and almost all the officers.

At 08:00 only one company remained available, artillery units and the III divisional mortar battalion were only available, who were trying to prevent the spread of the enemy in the direction of Novo Svetlova and Voroshilovgrad.

A Soviet battalion and hundreds of partisans attacked Ivanovka, arrested by the fire actions of the defense.

To the Army Section Command was reported the numerical thinning of the units and was also accounted for the exhaustion of combatants after three days of continuous struggle with the temperatures oscillating around -40°. General Fretter Pico invited us to do as much as humanly possible, waiting for armored units.

They arrived at 13:30 on January 22<sup>nd</sup> and from Ivanovka they moved on Kruscilovka, followed by the *Ravenna* infantry, who took over that town on the same evening.

On January 23, the action of the German armored vehicles on Makarof and Iljevka continued with the supported by an Italian vehicle unit, which, before the German units, re-occupied Iljevka.

Other Italian units also reoccupied Makarof.

In the evening, the Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army sent to the Division with a short telegram: "*Bravo Ravenna!*".

Still on that evening, the Army Section Command announced that the *Ravenna* Division, remaining in its dependencies, would be replaced to reorganize itself.

On January 24, the remaining units of the Grande Unit gathered in the Samsonof - Krasnodonskij area, moved in stages to the Rovenki area between 27 and 29 January.

On January 30, *Ravenna* returned to the organic dependence of the II Corps.

G) BREAK DOWN OF THE SECTOR HELD  
BY THE GERMAN XXIV ARMORED ARMY CORPS  
AND ISOLATION OF THE ALPINE ARMY CORPS  
(9 - 31 JANUARY)

The resumption of Soviet offensive operations had been anticipated by increased activity and the inflow of new forces against the right wing of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army. In this way, a new pincer movement was mentioned.

This was the "*Operation Ostrogozsk; - Rossosc*", launched by the Voronezh Front between 13 and 27 January 1943 (*Drawing No 42*).

This operation had the following purposes:

- to round up and destroy the forces deployed in the Ostrogozsk - Rossosc area;
- to reach the alignment Repievka - Alekseievka - Valuijki - Urazovo to acquire control of the railway line having meridian-oriented Svoboda (Liski) - Kantemirovka.

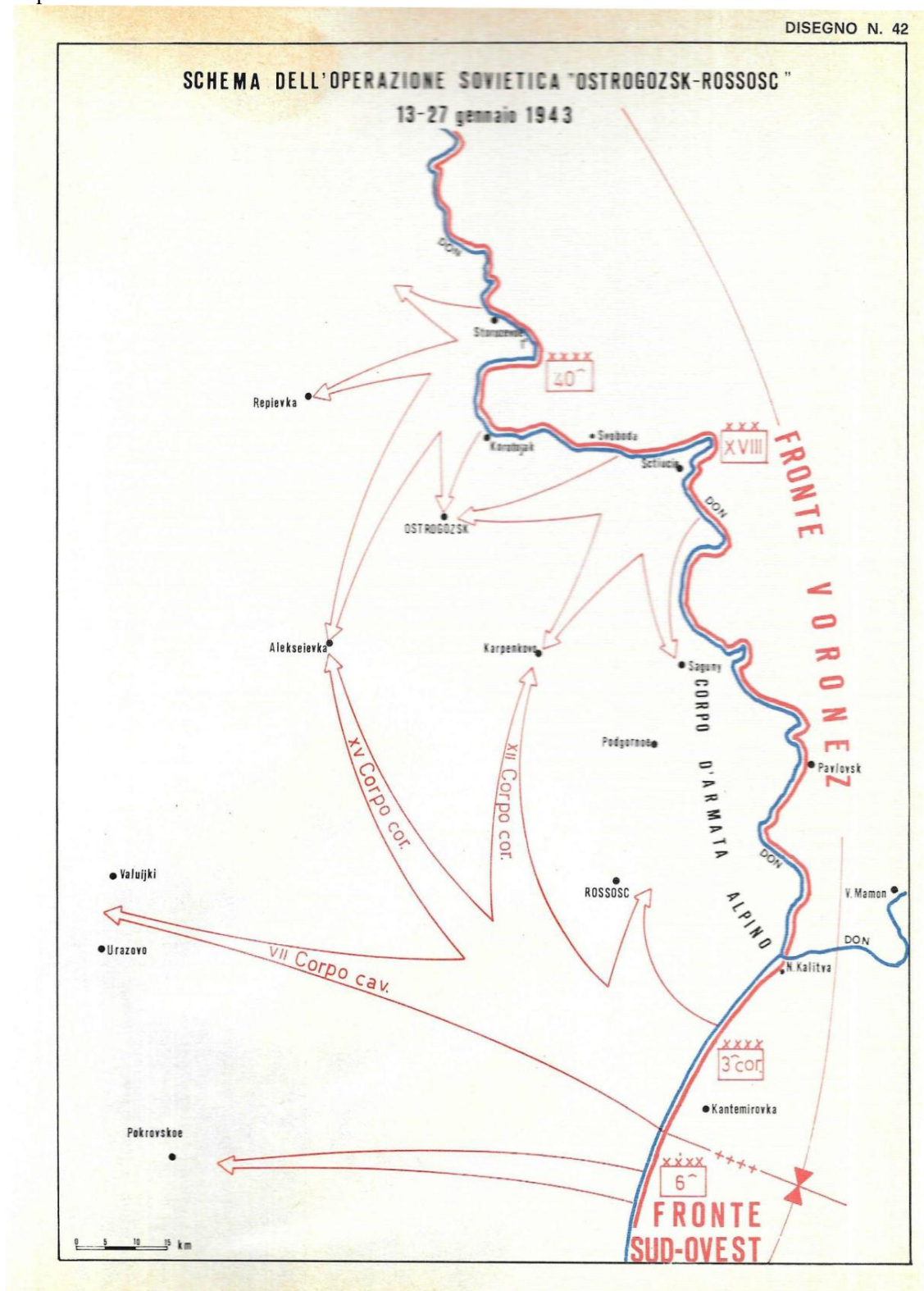
The offensive, extended on a 260-kilometer front, was launched with parts of three forces:

- to the north, the 40<sup>th</sup> Army (five Divisions and a Guards Rifle Brigade, a Armored Corps);
- in the center, the XVIII Rifle Corps (three Divisions and one Rifle Brigade, two Brigades and a Armored Regiment);



# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.42





- to the south (that is, against the right side of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, constituted by the German XXIV Armored Army Corps), the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Army: two armored Corps (XXII and XV), a cavalry Corps (VII), three Divisions and a Rifle Brigade.

The operation received assistance and security in the south with the objective as Pokrovskoe, led by the right wing of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army of the Southwest Front.

The 40<sup>th</sup> Army had to attack from the area of Storozevoe 1<sup>st</sup> initially west (in the direction of Repievka) and then southwest.

The XVIII Rifle Corps had the task of launching the attack from the Sctiucie area on Karpenkovo (that is, against the VII Hungarian Army Corps on the left flank of the Alpine Army Corps).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Army had to launch a deep attack from the area northwest of Kantemirovka towards Alekseievka, where it was planned to join the 40<sup>th</sup> Army to close the Italian, Hungarian, and German forces in a pocket. The VII Cavalry Corps, operating on the left flank of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Army, had the task of occupying the area between Valuijki and Urazovo in order to break the Kastorno-Kupjansk railway communication route. The Cavalry Corps had been reinforced with a Armored Brigade, three Skier Rifle Brigades, a anti-tank regiment, a mortar regiment, a counter-aircraft artillery regiment, and a multiple rocket launcher Group (Bn).

The Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army was deployed in the area of action of the southern branch of the pincer operation.

The width of the front, the fatigue of the units of the German XXIV Armored Corps, destined to be directly invaded by the offensive, the uncertain situation of the units south of Tciornaja Kalitva made very limited means available to the Italian Army to counteract the Soviet action.

The Alpine Corps, with no Grande Units in the second line, was busy guarding the banks of the Don. The XXIV Corps and the German 19<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, most directly threatened, and who had been worn out in the fighting to stop the advance to the west of the Soviet 6<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Armies, were scattered on a wide front, divided into discontinuous occupations without depth, to the establishment of a valid resistance position.

The Command of Army Group "B":

- it signaled as the next attack against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army, along the route of the Svoboda - Rossosca railway;
- ordered the reinforcement of the anti-tank defense of the Alpine Corps, ceding weapons to other areas of the Army;
- stated that in the area Podgornoe - Karpenkovo - Jevdakovo had been collected, the dependencies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army, the Cramer group (2 German infantry Divisions and 1 Hungarian Armored Division).

The Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army replied:

- drawing the attention of the Higher Command to the situation of the southern wing of the XXIV Corps and the possibility that enemy actions coinciding with that envisaged on the front of the 2nd Hungarian Army would be carried out against the XXIV Corps rather than the Alpine;
- demanding that the armaments of the XXIV Army Corps and the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored Division should not be lightened and that the Cramer Group's action was also planned for the south.

The Army Group maintained their point of view by ordering the transfer to the Army Corps of the anti-tank of both the XXIV Corp and of the 19<sup>th</sup> Armor (transfer not carried out for the acclimatization of the threat on the southern front of the Army). It assigned 18 anti-tank pieces of 50 mm to the Alpine Corps, of which only six were delivered (27).

Nothing more concrete was prepared to ward off the growing threat to the right wing; indeed, they were designed by the German side

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(27) It seems that the Army Group "B" Command had an untrustworthy information situation. In fact, Marshal of the USSR F. Golikov, at that time commander of the Voronezh Front, writes in the *Voenno-Istoricheskij Journal* of January 1973: "*On the information Map of the German XXIV Corps, which came into his possession, in the main attack area of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Army, showed only six Rifle Divisions and two Armored Brigades*" (instead of all the Grande Units of his Army Front).

On the other hand, Golikov says, in front of the Alpine Corps was deployed on a 65 km front, "*a single reduced Rifle Division, the 270<sup>th</sup>*".

He had just seen the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command, as he then directed the conduct of the Soviet offensive.

actions to bring more east the deployment of the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored Division.

The only force was given since the arrival of the 320<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Division in Starobelsk's northwestern area, which began on January 10<sup>th</sup>, but only a "possible" intervention was planned in the direction of Rossosc, Kantemirovka, Belovodsk, but it was not assigned a precise operational task.

In total, the Army Forces consisted of 6 Infantry Divisions and 2 of Armored (of which the 27<sup>th</sup> now has no tanks and waiting to rebuild with the 2 reinforced regiments in course of arrival).

In particular, the German XXIV Armored Corps had three infantry divisions (*Julia*, 385<sup>th</sup>, 387<sup>th</sup>), of which two (*Julia* and 385<sup>th</sup>) were heavily worn out by the battles of the second half of December and the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored, with the limitations already stated.

On January 13, one day before the date set, the northern part of the Voronez Front attacked Storozhevoe 1<sup>st</sup>, achieving rapid success.

On January 14, the offensive went south. In the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, the action was directed against the southernmost part of the right wing of the XXIV Corps (Fegelein group, Führer guard battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Armored), heading west and northwest to Kamenka and the High Valley of Bielaja.

*"On the first day of the offensive, the Hitlerians resisted a rather tenacious resistance in the area of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Army. In order to break through the tactical defense throughout its depth, Gen. P.S. Rybalko (Commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Army) had to enter both Armored Corps into battle, after which the situation in the Army sector changed radically to ours. The Units of the XXIV German Armored Corps, defended in the breakout section of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Army, began to withdraw north and northwest"* (Mar. F. Golikov, in the Soviet magazine quoted above).

Meanwhile, the Soviet XVIII Rifle Guards Corps, that was overwhelming, from the Sctiucie area, the VII Hungarian Army Corps, threatened to turn the left wing of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army (Alpine Army Corps).

The Command of the Army proposed to the Army Group the need to:

- to retreat the left wing of the XXIV Corps at the Krinitscnaja valley, earning the availability of the 385<sup>th</sup> Division;

- have a part of the Cramer group (to combine, in conjunction with other forces recovered from the front, an enemy action tending toward Rossosc) and part of the 320<sup>th</sup> Division already in the area (to contain, in union to the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored, the enemy pressure west - southwest).

Army Group "B" welcomed two of the proposals, excluding the one on the Cramer Group, already engaged in the north. Therefore it was ordered to re-establish the line from the positions of Don up to Novo Kalitva, continuing on Krinitscnaja - Mirrofanovka - Kulikovka - Bondarevo - Novo Markovka.

Lastly, the Commander of the Army had been present at the Command of the Army Group by the Chief of General Staff of the German Connection Command, the need to anticipate the repatriation of the Alpine Army Corps, reminding him of the commitment previously taken by the German High Command to avoid isolation at any cost.

The rupture of the weak defensive line, the almost complete cancellation of the operational capacity of the attacked units, the absence of reserves and the threat from the south of the remaining forces of the German XXIV Corps and the Alpine Army Corps still made the situation very serious for the 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

On the same day, on the front of the Alpine Army Corps in the sector of the *Vicenza* Division, the attack by two Soviet battalions against the *Vestone* alpine battalion was sharply rejected.

On the day of *January 15*, the enemy, who had resumed the attack by entering in battle new armor units after destroying the remaining forces of the Fegelein group and of the "Führer guard battalion", and after causing serious losses to the 387<sup>th</sup> Division, reached with the bulk Michailovka, Scilino, Novo Belaja and near Beloluzkaja.

Following the collapse of the right wing of the XXIV Corps in the Mitrofanovka area, the German 385<sup>th</sup> Division and the *Julia*, who had their lines fractured, had to retreat to the west, aiming to cover Rossosc city with a veil of units. The *Julia* was deployed in the Krinitscnaja area,

However, substantial Russian armored units were able to make thrusts at Olichovatka and Rossosc.

A unit of a Armored Brigade of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Army, consisting of twenty tanks, carrying ten men each, was at 05:30 in Rossosc. Here was the seat of the Command of the Alpine Army Corps, which having sent their anti-tank arm in the line, did not have an efficient defense at the outskirts of the town. The struggle was carried between the houses, the officers and the alpine and the elements of the various commands and services, the *Monte Cervino* ski battalion, backed by two German assault guns, and then a squadron of "stukas", were able to destroy 12 tanks, capture 40 prisoners and eliminate most of the infantry carried on the tanks. At 16:00 the few Russian survivors left Rossosc.

In this general situation, aggravated by the beginning of the repatriation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command demanded authorization to reverse the deployment, in keeping with the movements of the same 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.

The question posed to the German Supreme Command did not get the necessary consensus and therefore the Alpine Corps had to stay on the Don. Nor was the partial retreat of the XXIV Corps on the Ternovka - Grakof - north Michailovka line to be accepted, to form a defensive flank to protect the alpine's deployment.

General Gariboldi, on the other hand, confirmed his last order, pointing to the Chief of Connection that the measure was imposed by the situation.

The Command of the Army Group took note of this by declaring itself dissenting, but by the same evening the German Supreme Command came to ratify the Order of the Army.

The breakthrough of the enemy between Michailovka and Kamenka was irreparable, and there was no force available to the Army to close the hole.

To the north of it remained the Alpine Corps and the surviving units of the German XXIV Corps, so small that it could be considered only afterwards as a reinforcement for the Italian Grande Unit.

In the south, however, the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored Division was left, and the remains of the 27<sup>th</sup> and what had come of the 320<sup>th</sup>.

The enemy had already pushed large amounts of armored units north of the Alpine Corps, while the mass of

his foot units followed the movement and extended it extensively northwest, in the direction of Valujki.

On *January 16*, north of the breach, the XXIV Corps, heavily pressed, was withdrawing on the line of Tciornaja Kalitva - Rossosc - Olichovatka. During the execution of the movement, the *Julia* was attacked by the enemy and suffered serious losses, especially in the *Tolmezzo* and *Val Cismon* battalions, who were caught in motion.

To the south of the breach, the remains of the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored resisted on the line Novo Belinskaja - Donzovka - Tischhof. The 19<sup>th</sup> Armor resisted in the positions occupied and gathered within them the Tcertkovo garrison, of which it has already been said. On the same day, the small Italian garrison at the Gartmiscsevka aviation ground - unable to break the strong encirclement - was cleared with transport aircraft.

The Soviet forces operating against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army had broken up the line and had penetrated toward Ostrogozsk for over 50 kilometers.

On that day, in spite of past and ongoing events, although the state of the divisions of the XXIV Corps (including the *Julia*) was not unknown, Army Group "B" Command had the unmediated order (*Document n. 117*) that on the night of the 18<sup>th</sup>, the same Corps operated southwest in the direction of Rovenki, in order to stop the enemy advance.

The Army Command once again asked the German connection's office that a further stay on Don, given the current situation, would have caused serious consequences and that, therefore, that therefore a withdrawal was inevitable.

The Command of the Alpine Corps, meanwhile, decided to immediately move its headquarters from Rossosc (to the right of the sector) to Podgornoe (left), leaving the defense of the area to the local zone command and dispersed units. He also established, through a Command Officer, a direct connection with the neighboring Hungarian VII Army Corps, the Commander who at that time excluded the possibility of abandoning the Don line. Finally ordered the concentration in Podgornoe of vehicles and warehouses, in order to provide for their subsequent clearing on Karpenkovo and Nikolaievka. The *Edolo* battalion (*Tridentina* Division) repelled repeatedly attacks of the enemy.

Even on day of the 16<sup>th</sup>, Rossosc was again attacked by tanks and truck carried infantry and fell for the most

Into the hands of the enemy, while prolonging the resistance of some units to the periphery of the inhabited area.

At 17:30 the Army Command formulated the absolute prohibition of alpine units leaving the line of the Don, personally responsible for the execution of the order, by the Grande Unit Commanders (*Document. No. 118*).

In the evening, in a conversation with the Commanding General of the XXIV Armored Corps, the Commander of the Alpine Corps felt to reconfirm the very limited operational capacity of that Grande Unit, whose units were very small in actual numbers, physically exhausted and scarcely provided with ammunition .

It was impossible to execute the order directly issued by the German General Command to the XXIV Corps to disengage from the enemy in close agreement with the Alpine Army Corps and to break west or southwest, shifting the resistance in the area of Olchovatka and making connection with the 320<sup>th</sup> Division.

On the night of January 17<sup>th</sup>, enemy forces valued at two regiments attacked the front of the *Tridentine* Division, rejecting them with great losses from the battalions of *Vestone*, *Morbegno* and *Edolo*.

During the day the enemy deepened his penetration to the west.

Hungarian Units, contrary to previous orders, had left Don's positions and only then the Army Group Command authorized the deployment of the Alpine Corps. This is dealt with separately later.

After the 3<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Armored Army broke up the deployment of the German XXIV Armored Corps and with its VII Cavalry Corps proceeded to Valujki, the other Russian forces of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army operating south of the parallel of Kantemirovka began a strong pressure on the front of the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored Division and then on the front and left wing of the 320<sup>th</sup> Division. This, for his modest slow-flowing forces, could not promptly make its action felt.

It was estimated that the enemy had two goals:

- push for the Kupjansk - Karkov mineral - industrial basin of Donez, so as to remove the availability of the Germans, rather than to retrieve it in their interest;
- to turn the Don Army Group from the north, slowing down the Soviet advance in the southern part of the front, both to rescue the German 6<sup>th</sup> Army at Stalingrad,

and to allow the Army "A" Group to fall back from the Caucasus area.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Army, with the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, the remains of the 27<sup>th</sup> and 320<sup>th</sup>, developed its own action in a maneuvering defense, following successive swings westward, leaning on the river lines, descending from the north to south, so as to cover the Kupjansk - Karkov direction and the left wing of the Don Army Group, as well as giving time to the German units (the Gross Deutschland Division and the SS Armored Corps) to arrive and then carry out the counter-maneuver restoring the situation.

On the night of *18 January*, the Command of the Army Group "B" issued directives aimed at gaining time and covering the Don Army Group: Valujki had to be held at any cost, occupying and defending the line east of Valujki - Nikitovka - Ajdar River, while the Derkul River line south of Novo Pskof should have been kept as long as possible. The intention to have an action on Rovenki carried out by the XXIV Corps (which was mentioned earlier) was unviable, as Valujki was already threatened.

On *January 19*, the same Command insisted that the Derkul line was still maintained, but since enemy infiltrations had already occurred in the west of the Ajdar, that intention was outdated and the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army ordered the withdraw from Ajdar of the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored. On the same day, the fall of Valujki and the resulting threat to the headquarters of the Army Command at Kupjansk determined the move to Tciugujev.

On *January 20*, the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored preformed the withdraw on Ajdar, while an Italian Bersaglieri motorcycle battalion, reinforced by two armored vehicles, blocked the Kupjansk-Valujki road.

On *21 January*, due to the impossibility of cutting off the enemy's infiltration on Belokurakino, the deployment had to be retreated to the Belaja Valley, north of Starobelsk. The Army Group Command changed the southern sector limit of the Army, which was expanded. By obeying the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command that with its reduced forces would not even allow vigilance, practically facilitating the initiatives of the enemy, the 23<sup>rd</sup>



*January* was set as a new sector limitation the Kantemirovka - Starobelsk - Liman – Donez's bend line 12 km north of Slavjansk - Barvenkovo - Lozovaja. But the Army had to surrender the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored Division to the Don Army Group. The units remained in withdraw performing a delaying action.

On *January 25*, the Army Group Command specified their previous directives of:

- delaying the enemy's advance on the Valujki - Kupjansk and Starobelsk - Kupjansk lines, in contact with Don Army Group;
- create at Kupjansk a strongpoint to be defended to the utmost;
- conduct reconnaissance actions in the Valujki area, where the enemy was inactive.

To perform these tasks, there was arriving in the Valujki sector of the Gross Deutschland Division and in the Karkov area an SS Army Corps (divisions Adolf Hitler and Reich).

On *27 January*, the Army Group Command assigned the 320<sup>th</sup> Division the primary job of securing the left arm of the Don Army Group and therefore, if forced to retreat, it would have to move southwest. To the observation that this would be open to the enemy Starobelsk - Kupjansk - Karkov, it was replicated that the assignment was to be considered more important than the defense of the Donez basin.

In the following days the line flattened gradually to the southwest, however without uncovering Kupjansk and the road on Karkov,

On *January 30*, the Army moved its command center to the suburbs south - east of Karkov (Novo Bavaria).

On *January 31*, after the remains of the Alpine Corps had returned to Scebekino, at 24:00, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Commanded ceded to the Lanz Group (German) the operational responsibility of the sector to move to the northeast of Kiev to oversee the movements of Italian units directed to the reorganization zone.

During the withdrawal phase, until the end of January, on the southern wing of the Army, Italian units had worked to defend some important locations, obstructing the adversary, as the Tcertkovo and Gartmiscevka garrisons had already done:

- in Belovodsk, the XXVI Carabinieri Movement Battalion (*Vicenza* Division), reinforced by minor elements, had defended the locality that blocked the Starobelsk road;
- at Starobelsk XXVII Complementary Artillery Group, XXVI Artillery Battalion, 14<sup>th</sup> Artillery Specialist Unit, a company of the 450<sup>th</sup> mobile territory battalion, a labor company, a rogue company of engineers, a water company, and a company of artisans had provided defense of the locality and protection of the railway line;
- at Kupjansk again elements of the XXVI Battalion of Carabinieri, a battalion formation (complements), the XXXVI group of anti-aircraft artillery and minor elements had held the barrier of the Valujki-Kupjansk roadway and the defense of this city;
- at Millerovo, a place outside the 8<sup>th</sup> Army sector, defended by German units, had consisted of nuclei of Italian military personnel in the logistical base and had joined other units already deployed on the Don, all in precarious physical conditions. A group of more animated members of all arms and services, on December 27, voluntarily formed a unit of the consistency of a company, actively participating in defense and sortie for returning to friendly lines on January 16.

The task entrusted to the southern wing of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army had been overcome by overcoming the obstacles created by the inadequacy of the forces employed in line, the lack of reservations, the slowness in the arrival of new units, the action of the enemy, superior in means and in fact.

The battle playing for time in the second half of January had allowed the gathering of a German mass in the Donez area, destined to carry out subsequent counter-offensive operations.

The main feature of the Ostrogozsk-Rossosc operation consisted in the fact that the Soviets planned to carry out turning and elimination of forces at the same time. They essentially tended to annihilate enemy units even before they were completely locked in the pocket. On the other hand, the inner ring of encirclement was not continuous, as the Soviet forces statically controlled only the road nodes and the inhabited centers located on the most likely withdraw paths.

In order to achieve a better success in the Ostrogozsk-Rossosc operation, the Soviet Command had implemented

a plan of deception, or "*masking operational*", according to its military terminology (28), considered to be "*noteworthy*" by Soviet military scholars. Its implementation has been described as follows:

*"By order of the Front Command, the 40<sup>th</sup> Army, to deceive the enemy, had to simulate, from 7 to 20 December, a concentration of forces and an attack preparation from the bridgehead of Storozcuoe on Korotojal; - and from the area of the railway station of Suoboda (sector of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army). The Army had to create the impression of making crossings in the wire, creating the false approach routes, and massive forces for the offensive, to carry out the reconnaissance activities with the command groups, to improve road traffic, etc. The following facts showed that the enemy was actually deceived. For example, it often opened fire on the Army units, intensifying observation in the Storozcuoe Bridge Headquarters instead of transferring the reserves to the southwestern sector that, after the offensive, December 16, 1942, successfully completed its operation.*

*"On January 12, the 40<sup>th</sup> Army of the Voronez Front began the offensive from the Storozcuoe Bridge Head, which was unexpected by the enemy. The operative disguise measures adopted since December 16, the enemy was deceived for the second time, believing that the 40<sup>th</sup> Army would be attacking not by the bridge head of Storozcuoe but in the Voronez area. Troops were given on the steppes away from the front and above all during the night sky. The fog night hid the convoy movements to the front and all the other activities related to the preparation of the offensive. By day, the bridge head regains its calm.*

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(28) "*Operational masking consists of a set of measures taken by a Command to mislead the enemy about the type of imminent own war activity, the concept of operations, the scope, the time chosen, and also the conceal their troops and military targets to the enemy*" (Kratkij slovar operativno - takticeskih i obscevoennyh sloverminov M. 1958, page 156; Tolkovyj slovar voennyh terminov M. 1966, page 228).

The expression "*operativnaja musleiroulea*", translated here with "operational masking", does not find exact correspondence in a similar expression of Italian military doctrine. The definition given by the Soviet nominee for "*operativnaja maskirovka*" reported by the daily summery corresponds, in part, to the concepts contained in the Military Nominee (Army) to the terms "plan of deceit" and "masking".

*"At the same time, in the area of Voronez, an ostentatiously intense movement of troops was, especially at night. From time to time the lights on the vehicles flickered, the noise of the tank engines was heard, were detonated large charges that simulated the heavy artillery. Supplemental river crossings were made on the Don's ice, etc..."*

*"The implementation of this deception plan, specifically prepared by the Army Command, was entrusted to a regiment of the reserve, to the second echelon of the Divisions and Army reserves. Not once, these units moved by day, but by night, demonstrating that the concentration of massive forces was in progress.*

*"The enemy lent faith to naught. He felt that two Rifle Divisions, a Rifle Brigade, and a Armored Brigade had been placed in the Bridgehead of Storozevoe, that is, forces almost three times lower than those in reality. He also did not expect the main attack in that area. Accurate operational disguise made it possible to realize the surprise, which was an important success factor of the operation" (29).*

The success of the operation contributes once again to the excessively rigid conduct of the defense, so that the forces deployed in areas not directly invested in the Soviet offensive, apart from not contributing in any way to the arrest operation, were soon closed in various pockets. Marshal Golikov writes in this regard: "... it should be noted that the order of the German Supreme Command to fight on the line of the Don up to the last blood had a lot of weight on how the enemy troops defended against our attacking forces and on the overall results of the Ostrogozsk - Rossosc operation" (quoted *Rivista Storico- Militare Sovietica*, page 65).

#### H) RETREAT OF THE ALPINE ARMY CORPS

(17 - 31 JANUARY)

(Drawing No 43)

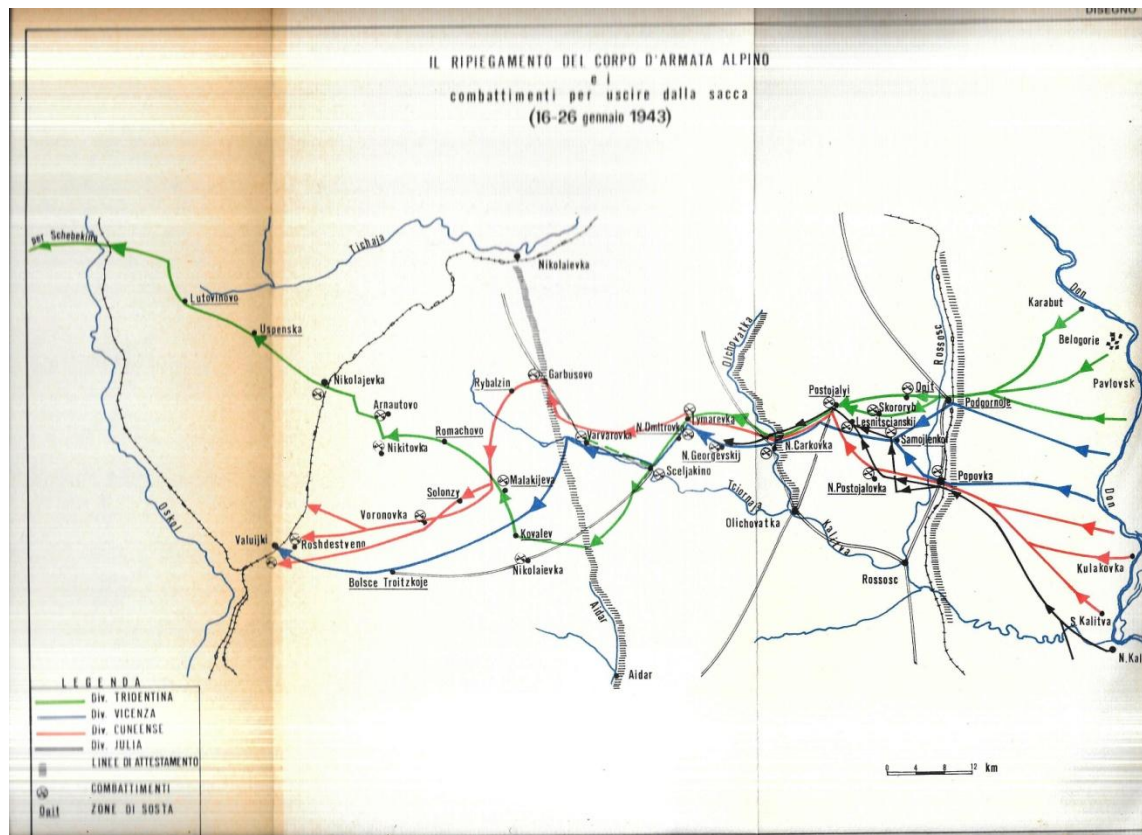
At 11:00 on January 17, the Alpine Corps Command transmitted verbally to the dependent Divisions on the repatriation order, immediately confirmed in writing, as received by

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(29) Maj. Gen. V. MATSULENKO, in *Voenno Istoricheskij Zhurnal*, January 1972.

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n. 43



the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army (*Document No. 119*), with which the Alpine Grande Units were guided to make the movements by adjusting them on the three successive lines of arrest (30):

- the Railway Jevdakovo - Rossosc;
- the valley of Olchovatka;
- the valley of Ajdar - Nikolaievka.

During the day the Alpine Corps Command received news that Postojalyi had been attacked and occupied by tanks and carried infantry, coming from the south. In this way the evictions from Podgornoe had been blocked, since the Soviets had blocked the Rossosc - Olchovatka road from the 15<sup>th</sup> onwards.

The isolation, carried out by enemy armored and motorized units behind the Alpine Corps, set this in the need to operate alone to open the road to the west in order to reach friendly lines.

The Command of Army Group "B" was transfer to the dependence of the Alpine Corps with the modest remains of the XXIV Armored Corps of Germany. Four tanks, 2 assault guns, 5 artillery pieces, and a rocket launcher were still efficient. The 385<sup>th</sup> and 387<sup>th</sup> Divisions, after a month of fighting, were virtually destroyed and the survivors had formed squads that had been united to the Italian collapsing columns.

The movement of the four Italian Divisions overwhelmed about 10,000 Germans and Hungarians stragglers, with innumerable sledges and other obstacles, trying rather to look for food and shelter for the night, rather than to take part in the fighting supported by the Italians.

The rupture of contact with the enemy occurred at the same time on the entire front of the Army Corps at dusk and developed overnight on 18 January. Within the divisions, columns were formed, gradually less numerous and more substantial.

The *Tridentine Division* was made up of three columns, which began the movement to Podgornoe protected by a rearguard and reached the line of arrest at the railroad on the night, on which they deployed eastwards. The Alpine Army Corps Command, still located in Podgornoe, joined with *Tridentina*, placing

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(30) Line defined on the ground by easily identifiable topographic details, at which the units stand by giving notice to the High Command. It is used to coordinate tactical movement or tactics in the direction of the front.

to the dependencies of it a part of the troops and services of the Army Corps.

The *Vicenza Division* carried out the withdraw towards the railway line, articulated on two columns. The north column headed to Podgornoe. Here the *Morbegno* and *Vestone* battalions were part of their *Tridentine Division*. This, in turn, returned to *Vicenza* the two battalions it had had at the end of December. The southern column headed to Popovka.

In Podgornoe, the Army Corps Command ordered that 3,000 soldiers of the units and services directly dependent on them would join with the *Vicenza*.

The *Cuneese Division* withdrew in the direction of Popovka, on two columns protected by the *Saluzzo* battalion, left in the rear as it deployed to the far south of the Army Corps and remained in close contact with the enemy avant-garde. After starting the movement, the Division Command lost contact with the Corps Command.

The *Julia Division*, which in the previous day of January 16 had to extend its defensive sector to replace German units for 25 kilometers, had retired to the northern shore of Tciornaja Kalitva. It retained, however, a bridgehead on the southern bank of that river at Novo Melniza, defended by the *Tolmezzo* battalion.

On those positions, the battalion had to rests violent attacks by the enemy, who could surround it. Broken the encirclement in an assault with the bayonet, the *Tolmezzo* rejoined his own Division. This, at dusk, resumed the retreating movement on two columns, aimed at continuing on Popovka - Lesnitscianskij.

During the day of January 18, the enemy encirclement was re-energizing: substantial Soviet units were reported at Rossosc, Olchovatka and the roadways that from these locations contained the Postojalyi crossroads. In addition, enemy tanks and infantry were also reported in the Opyt area.

The Army Corps Command, confirming the verbal orders already issued (*Document No. 120*), stated that the units should have "considered to operate as in the high mountain area," sacrificing all the mechanical means and relying only on those drawn by the mules.

The *Tridentine Division* continued to march in two columns only, starting the movement at dusk.

The *Vicenza Division* moved from Podgornoe - Popovka to Samojlenkof (Sematoevka).

The units of the *Cuneense Division*, during the night on 18 January, carried out neatly the movements to abandon the positions on the Don, out of the pressure of the enemy, except in the Annovka area, where they were attacked by regular and partisan forces, without the German units of the XXIV Corps were able to give protection.

The *Julia Division* returned to her Army Corps. It was heavily affected by the efforts made in the previous period, which were compounded by the general discomfort of the climate, the bad state of the roads, the lack of draft animals and fuel. The *Tolmezzo* battalion, who had lost the entire 12<sup>th</sup> company in the fighting at Meshonki on the Tciornaja Kalitva, was reinforced by 300 men of the VIII Complements Battalion, who came to Rossosc on January 13. The Division was in the course of the day located between Popovka and Sotniskaja, with the command arrived at Podgornoe, via Kurenj - Sergejevka. At midnight the 9<sup>th</sup> Alpine, on the outskirts of Popovka, suffered an attack from Rossosc.

On *January 19*, the movement went on slowly, stemming from the described difficulties, according to the orders given by the Army Corps Command.

The *Tridentine Division* fought with the forces of the enemy that hindered its march to the West. The column of the 6<sup>th</sup> Alpine (with the *Bergamo* and *Vicenza* groups, the II mixed Engineer Battalion and divisional services), who also had the task of protecting the uncovered right side of the Army Corps, aimed at Repjevka on Postojalyi and found this a place occupied by Russians. The *Verona* battalion moved to the attack but, after various events, could not occupy the town for the arrival of Russian armored elements. The *Verona* had to retire on Repjevka, holding the enemy pressure.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Alpine (with the *Val Camonica* group) headed to Skororyb, from where it moved to attack an enemy motorized column. In the fighting that followed the Alpine, managed to occupy the town, destroying some tanks, capturing prisoners and various materials.

While *Verona* was busy with enemy forces at Postojalyi, the bulk of the column reached Opyt (south-east of Repjevka). Beyond that, the *Val Chiese* battalion was started in support of the *Verona* who had barricaded himself in Repjevka.



At Opyt had already arrived at the Command of the Alpine Army Corps and the German XXIV Corps, numerous alpine of the *Julia* and about a thousand Hungarians stragglers coming from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division located to the left of the *Tridentina* and disordered by the action of the enemy.

During the early hours of the morning, other Hungarians stragglers and the remains of the German XXIV Corps to be framed in the *Tridentina*.

The uncertain situation, exacerbated by the fact that the right of the Corps was still uncovered, and that *Tridentina* was ahead of the movement of the other Divisions, prompted General Nasci to stay for the whole day, then to resume the attack the next day in the Postojalyi area. In the meantime, Opyt's defense was strengthened, the defenders were reorganized, as far as possible in formed units, in Repjevka the whole 6<sup>th</sup> Alpine (less the Vestone's 54<sup>th</sup> company) and the German units.

The *Vicenza Division* in the morning occupied Samojlenkof after a short fight. At 17:00 it received the order of the Corps of Commanders to continue on to Lesnitscianskij to compete on the next day with *Tridentina* in action at Postojalyi.

At nightfall, distracted by the confusion of the thousands of shaken outsiders and stragglers, it marched on the aforementioned goal of the battalion *Pieve di Teco* (31), reinforced by a group of artillery on horseback. The avant-garde, poorly led by guides and interpreters, instead of marching on Postojalyi had diverted to Opyt; was therefore immediately replaced by the CLVI divisional machine gun battalion and another artillery group on horseback.

The *Cuneense Division* had not yet been able to connect with the Army Corps Command. The Commander of the Division had, at Popovka, an interview with the German General Commander of the Rheingold Combat Group, who confirmed that the route Rossosc - Olichovatka - Valujki was in enemy's hand; instead the route on Popovka - Kulascevk - Sceljakino (or Varvarovka) - Valujki was controlled by German units. Therefore, the Commander of *Cuneense* decided to deviate from the itinerary assigned to him by the Armed Forces Command. Destroying all the vehicles and abandoned the carriages, the *Cuneense* was on two echelons, with the III/277<sup>th</sup> in the rear. About 19:00 this unit was attacked and overwhelmed by enemy troops in white camouflage suits, mistaken for Germans. The 14<sup>th</sup> company of the *Borgo San Dalmazzo* Alpine Battalion were also attacked and almost destroyed and the 72<sup>nd</sup>

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(31) The III/277<sup>th</sup> remained with the *Cuneo* Division.

battery of the *Val Po* group. The 21<sup>st</sup> company of the *Saluzzo* battalion, engaging in tenacious combat, allowed the column to continue on Novo Postojalyi, where it joined the *Julia Division* engaged in combat.

The *Julia Division* just reached the area of Novo Postojalovka - Soloviev - Kopanki, finding it strongly occupied by the Russians. It started a struggle that lasted for the whole day.

Also on the 19<sup>th</sup>, the Army Command ordered that the ruins of the German XXIV Corps be move alone on Rovenki, while the Alpine Corps would have to continue in the planned route. General Nasci, in agreement with the Commander of the XXIV Corps and with the German General, Chief of the Liaison Office, replied that the order was unenforceable given the conditions of the German Grande Unit. The Army Command accepted, ordering to speed up the movement, heading to Valujki.

Repeated requests made by the Alpine Corps Commander to obtain aerial intervention could not be met.

The same Commander urged the *Julia* and *Cuneense* to overcome the groove of the Olchovatka Valley as soon as possible.

On *January 20*, the Army Corps Command urged the *Vicenza* movement on Charkovka to take it to the west of the Olchovatka Valley, repeating its order to the other divisions. The commander of the XXIV Corp was commissioned to gather in the area of Skororyb all the German stragglers, to organize a temporary defense of the area, so as to ensure the march to the west.

At 07:00, Russian tanks and motorized infantry attacked Opyt, while the Command of the Alpine Army Corps was still there. The defense of the elements in place could not repel the attack and was overwhelmed, despite the sacrifice of some units. All the means of transport, baggage of the Command, all means of connection were lost. Only one German radio station was saved, mounted on a half-track, valid for the connection with the Army Command, but not with the divisions. The Army Corps Command, passing through Skororyb alone, moved to Novo Charkovka.

The general situation had now proved that the enemy offense came not so much from the east as a pinning action, but would have manifested itself in later barriers, to stop the westward march. Therefore, the Commander of the Army Corps decided to establish a strong avant-garde.

The *Tridentine Division*, at 02:00, was attacked from the north in the Opyt area, where the early withdrawal of the Hungarian Army had left the right wing of the Alpine Corps uncovered. The *Vestone Battalion* rejected the attack. At dawn, the movement of services, impediments and the stragglers fell under an intense fire of artillery, mortars, and automatic weapons of the enemy who, in the night, by maneuvering wide-ranging, had outlined an encirclement. There was a decisive attack on the enemy, to which all units had to be deployed. A counterattack of the II battalion divisional engineers was a good solution to the situation, but it cost the battalion the sacrifice of two-thirds of its men.

At Postojalyi the 6<sup>th</sup> Alpine was to fight for a few hours, even to hand to hand, to take possession of the inhabited area. After a short break, it went on to Novo Charkovka. The first encirclement was thus overcome.

In execution of the command of the Commander of the Corps, the Commander of *Tridentina* assumed the command of the avant-garde, made up of the 6<sup>th</sup> Alpine (less the *Verona* battalion), reinforced by *Bergamo* and *Vicenza* groups, artillery, rocket launchers and German tanks.

Upon reaching Novo Charkovka at 17:00, the locality had to be taken, fighting, the Soviet occupiers (two battalions reinforced by artillery, mortars and tanks). The enemies counter thrusts were thwarted.

The *Verona* battalion, who had been tasked with protecting the uncovered right flank, rejected an attack and continued marching to the divisional column.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Alpine and the remaining units reached Novo Charkovka overcoming the second enemy barrier.

The avant-garde of the *Vicenza Division*, on the night of the 20<sup>th</sup>, had to attack Lesnitscianskij, where the action of the enemy was also supported by armored vehicles and numerous mortars. An aggressive movement of *Pieve di Teco* battalion, gathered at the column, induced the opponent to retreat, leaving three tanks and some prisoners on the ground. The Division continued on to Postojalyi, facilitating the action taken by *Tridentina*. For the remainder of the day, units were on their way.

The *Cuneese Division* reached Novo Postojalovka by 02:00, joining elements of the *Julia* fighting to open the way. A first intervention by the *Ceva* Battalion, backed by the *Mondovì* group, cost both of them serious losses, but without

luck. The subsequent action of the battalions *Borgo San Dalmazzo* and *Saluzzo* did not get the best result. Towards the 15:00, the rear was also attacked; a battery of the *Val Po* group was lost.

Considering that south of the other elements of *Julia* (9<sup>th</sup> Alpine) fought unsuccessfully, the Division Commander decided to look for a point of lesser resistance to the north, heading to Postojalyi, except to fall back into the reallocating sector.

The *Julia Division* went for the whole day fighting to open the passage through the enemy positions of Novo Postojalovka, having also received assistance from units of the *Cuneense*.

In the evening, the Command, the 8<sup>th</sup> Alpine, and the *Conegliano* group disengaged from the struggle and united to the shifting action from the north, operated by *Cuneense*, to Postojalyi. The 9<sup>th</sup> Alpine with the *Udine* and *Val Piave* groups, from Kopanki, where they were stopped by the enemy all day, broke the contact by heading to Samojlenkof.

The joint action of *Julia* and *Cuneense* had greatly contributed to the salvation of the northern Army Corps column. This, already engaged on the front and the right flank, would have been in serious difficulty in supporting a southern attack, parried, instead by the two divisions.

At the end of the day, the Alpine Corps forces lost much of their operational efficiency as:

- the *Julia* battalions were reduced to less than 150 men each, supported by a few pieces of the *Conegliano* group scarcely equipped with ammunition;
- the *Cuneense* was found with three sorely tried battalions and no artillery;
- the *Vicenza*, which was not well adapted to its own organic constitution, even though it was reinforced by *Pieve di Teco* battalion, was in poor condition;
- the *Tridentina* was in a better position and had the reinforcement of the few, but precious, German armored vehicles.

On *January 21*, the Commander of the Army Corps, taking into account the general situation, found that *Tridentina* had overtaken the other divisions by about one stage, and considering the conditions of reduced efficiency of the other Grande Units, it was decided that the *Tridentina* assumed the vanguard of the entire Army Corp on the Kravzovka - Sceljakinovka – Lodomirovka

- Sciabskoje - Nicholaska (32) - Valujki. The other divisions would be called by moving along the same route, according to the order and the outlet locations in the Olchovatka valley.

The movement was resumed after the enemy's intentions to oppose the movement itself following the barrier on the roadway that cut the axis of the march, making wide use of motorized means.

The *Tridentine Division* was moving from Novo Charkovka to Lymarevka and Sceljakino, with the intention of marching quickly, at the expense of serious sacrifices, so as not to give the Soviets time to set themselves in rearward positions. Furthermore:

- conduct the marches during the many hours of darkness, to escape the observation of the enemy, leaving him uncertain about the direction followed;
- avoid as far as possible road travel and crossing inhabited areas;
- to keep separate units capable of fighting the masses of the stragglers of various nationalities, so that the organic structure is not broken and the possibility of tactical action is broken;

- depend on the dwellings to give shelter to men during rest hours and somehow attenuate the negative consequences of the stormy temperature.

The movement was resumed at 02:00 and the avant-garde occupied Lymarevka at 08:00, taking it from the regular and partisan forces rebuffed the previous day near Novo Charkovka.

The extraordinary cold of the day required not to go any further, though the town was not able to give shelter to the whole mass present. The last vehicles had to be abandoned, to use the very low fuel in the artillery tractors. Wounded and sick were carried by arms and men's backs, in an exemplary pattern of human solidarity.

The *Vicenza Division* now moved in the wake of the *Tridentina* and could not establish the radio link with *Cuneense* and *Julia* to cover the loss of Opyt's station by the Army Corps Command and by the *Tridentina*.

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(32) The name of Nicholajevka designates a township south of Varvarovka, and not the other of the same name then reached by *Tridentina* and not even a third located northeast, not touched by Alpine units.

The column reached Lymarevka with a slow and tiring march that absolutely required a stop in the town where for some other part of the men had to stay out in the open because of insufficient housing capacity. There was a kind of hospital for the admission of non-transportable, entrusting them to the care of volunteer staff.

In the town were the Commanders of *Cuneense* and *Julia*, who received verbally the orders of the Commander of the Corps.

At dawn, the *Cuneo Division* came to Postojalyi and at about 12:00 the 1<sup>st</sup> Alpine conquered the village with a German unit's assistance. It continued on to Novo Charkovka, reaching it in the early hours of darkness and staying for the night.

The *Julia Division* from Samojlenkof continued with the 8<sup>th</sup> Alpine and the *Conegliano* group on Novo Charkovka and crossed it by going west. The Division Command and the 9<sup>th</sup> Alpine with the *Udine* and *Val Piave* groups reached Lesnitscianskij. Hence the Command continued on Novo Charkovka, while the units stopped to settle and consume the ration. Attacked by powerful enemy units supported by tanks, they were almost completely destroyed and only a few elements were able to save themselves. The Division Command joined the Commands of *Cuneense* and *Vicenza*.

On the night of *January 22*, the Command of the Army Group "B", through the radio of the XXIV Corps, indicated Nikitovka as the point of departure of the Army Corps within the friendly lines, which required a partial modification of the planned route.

The shortest route to reach the designated location would have gone to Varvarovka, a place that was considered occupied, as it is located in the valley of Tciornaja Kalitva. But the short time did not allow to change the orders previously given and General Naschi therefore decided to also aim at Sceljakino, approaching Varvarovka from the south.

The avant-garde of the *Tridentine Division* (6<sup>th</sup> Alpine) reached the saddle dominating the village of Sceljakino at 10:00, welcomed by violent fire. The *Vestone* and *Val Chiese* alpine battalions and the German tanks, supported by the *Bergamo* and *Vicenza* groups, moved to the attack. The battalion *Edolo* (5<sup>th</sup> Alpine) played an aggressive action on the left; but the arrival in the town of the enemy's tanks was fearful of a reversal of the situation, which was however overcome by the tenacity and the mood of the units.

Immobilized a part of the enemy's tanks, silenced his artillery, driving out the Soviet defenders from the houses, pronounced the aggressive action of *Edolo*, the town was cleared of the adversary, who suffered serious losses and it was occupied by the alpine.

At dusk the column continued on to Lodomirovka, arriving in the night. During the march new Soviet forces, partially armored, came from the south, investing the column on their flank. Not to be overwhelmed, the column shifted to Varvarovka, where *Morbegno* battalion, clashing with other enemy forces coming from the north, plunged into a bloody struggle and sacrificed to give way to the rest of the column to save itself by diverting westward.

The *Vicenza Division* started driving in the night, with three German assault guns, almost free of ammunition. When it came to Sceljakino, found it strongly guarded by enemy motorized units, return to deploy on the spot after being removed by the *Tridentina*.

A first attack on the remains of II/277<sup>th</sup> was rejected and had to be taken by the entire column with the support of German assault guns. The Italian column penetrated the town, immobilized the Soviet tanks, upsets defensive preparations, but new Russian forces attacked the column's queue destroying the division's headquarters and a CLVI divisional machine gun battalion.

The action of *Vicenza* had served to release the *Tridentina* and German units.

At the first lights, the *Cuneense Division* resumed its march on Lymarevka, arriving at 12:00. The 1<sup>st</sup> Alpine was joined to the column, but was attacked by three Russian tanks. After the attack, the regiment was stopped at Lymarevka. The rest of the division continued on Novo Dmitrovka, which, occupied by the enemy, was conquered by the *Dronero* battalion and the IV mixed engineer battalion. The Division suffered the loss of hundreds of alpine remain that were kept along the itinerary. In the evening, the Commander of the Division expressed the wish to leave, to leave the column to try to save himself in isolation.

The movement of the *Julia Division* became more tiring and heavy. In the morning the remains of the 8<sup>th</sup> Alpine, in the area of Novo Georgevskij, were reached, surrounded and captured by the enemy. During the day the Division Command reached the Sceljakino area, where it was also surrounded and attacked by enemy forces.

At the end of the day, what remained of the Alpine Corps was stacked on a single route. The situation was extremely confusing for the gathering of several thousand men, including many German and Hungarian stragglers. Sleds and carts were moving in the town, partially in flames and beaten by the cannons of enemy tanks.

The Soviets, always aware of the locations and directions of the various stakes, aware of the need for enemy units to sit down to mitigate climatic difficulties, using motorized units preceded the unraveling units in the occupation of the inhabited places on the routes. The struggle to seize the dwellings themselves was a vital necessity for surviving the frost. Other enemy units attacked the columns on their flanks, tried to split the tails of the columns, captured the stragglers handing them into the hands of the partisans.

On *January 23*, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command, on the basis of the only German radio station remaining efficient after the Soviet invasion, informed the Command of the Corps that Nikitovka was occupied by the enemy. Therefore, the column was made to stop in the village of Romachova, to save and carry out the necessary reorganization for the inevitable combat.

At dawn, the *Tridentine Division* resumed the movement, striving to give the march a fast pace to exploit the success achieved on the previous day. In Nikolaievka (9 kilometers west of Sciabskoje), a formation of partisans, supported by 4 pieces of medium caliber, was eliminated by the Alpine and German tanks. The stage was ended at Kovalev.

The *Vicenza Division*, which had no connection with the Higher Command, moved to Varvarovka at dawn to make a stopover, even in the hope of reuniting with the 278<sup>th</sup> infantry. While the same Division Commander was trying to rearrange the pieces of the collapsed column, the violent action of mortars and enemy aircraft re-deformed the units. After the crisis, an adventurous armored formation attacked the column in various waves, after destroying the 278<sup>th</sup> infantry.

The remains of the Division (Command, 2 Carabinieri sections, a few infantrymen of the 277<sup>th</sup>, the remnants of the CLVI machine guns battalion, the Command of the Horse Artillery Regiment, a few thousand men clustered in inefficient unit formations) settled around and inside a farm near Varvarovka.

In the evening the movement was resumed for Bolsce Lipyagi.



Before dawn, the *Cuneo* Division met at Nova Dmitrovka and continued on in two echelons, marching for the entire day, heading for Garbusovo and Rybalzin. The 1<sup>st</sup> Alpine was overtaken by a partisan attack.

The core of the *Julia Division*, which still fought around in the Sceljakino area, was at dawn overwhelmed.

The commanding general with four other officers and about 50 alpine troops managed to escape the capture and joined the *Cuneense* column.

On the day of *January 24*, the Army Corps Command had no news of the events of the employed Grande Units, except for the *Tridentina*, who shared the fate. The uncertainty over the whole situation was made even worse by the lack of graphic charts of the crossed area. Freezing and skirmishing continued to cause huge losses. The Armed Forces Commander informed the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army that, due to the huge losses in men and materials, the Alpine Grande Unit was no longer usable. The requests for air supplies of food and medicines could not be met.

After a night march, at 10:00 the *Tridentine Division* reached Malakijeva with the avant-garde, under enemy fire artillery. The rigid temperature demanded that the action for the conquest of the inhabited area be swiftly run so as to avoid long-awaited combatants in the snowstorm at -40° C. The artillery immediately took over, the German tanks came into action backed by the *Vestone* and *Val Chiese* battalions, and at 12:00 the town was conquered. The Russians lost 600 men counted on the ground, copious infantry equipment, light and heavy, and 12 guns of medium caliber.

The march continued on Romankovo; to fool starvation, men and quadrupeds could only ingest frozen snow. The stage location was reached at 16:00. The *Verona* battalion returned to its 6<sup>th</sup> regiment.

The *Vicenza Division* continued until 04:00 the night march, resumed after only one hour of stop. In the midday hours reach a village with an unknown name and to stop there for the night.

The *Cuneo Division* (Command and 2<sup>nd</sup> Alpine), after Garbusava, reached Rybalzin at 08:00 and stopped there. The 1<sup>st</sup> alpine, arriving at dawn at Garbusovo, attacked by tanks, underwent new heavy

losses and came to Rybalzin at noon, was caught by a snowstorm that forced the units to stay for the whole night.

On *January 25*, the Army Command, by means of a plane landed near the column, informed Generali Nasci that the outlet point was established at the junction 16 km south-east of Novi Oskol and that Nicholajevka, heavily guarded by enemy, it should be attacked in order to continue.

The *Tridentine Division* resumed the march on Nikitovka at dawn, with weak resistance from regulars and partisans. Numerous towns were crossed, whose inhabitants supplied the hungry alpine food.

The *Verona* and *Vestone* battalions, the 255<sup>th</sup> company of the *Val Chiese*, a battery of the *Bergamo* group, with the German tanks, which were avant-garde, pushed forward for a couple of hours to reach Arnautovo.

The Division's Command ordered for the following day:

- the contemporary departure of the avant-garde and the column, already spaced in the housing;
- Nicholaska attack by the avant-garde, supported by the rest of the column.

The *Vicenza Division* resumed the march on Bolshe Lipjagi, who arrived in the night, stopping there. The *Pieve di Teco* Battalion, avant-garde, hit by the fire of mortars, attacked the enemy units, succeeding in releasing 100 Italian soldiers held as prisoners.

The *Cuneo Division* units headed for Malakija.

The *Dronero* Battalion, vanguard, to open the pass to the column, had to start a fight backed by the *Mondovì* and a group of artillery. The retreating enemy released 200 Italian prisoners.

The column split: the Division Command and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Alpine Mountains reached Malakijeva at 24:00; the 1<sup>st</sup> Alpine reached the village of Solonzy.

The day of *January 26* seems decisive for the collapse of the Alpine Grande Units, which had to not only break the barrier predisposed by the enemy, but also to break down the aggression, manifested until the hours of the night, in advance of the contact with the defensive positions.

The vanguard of the *Tridentine Division*, rested at the western outskirts of Nikitovka, at 02:00 was attacked by Russian regulars and partisans. After a few hours of fighting, the enemy was rejected.

In the vicinity of Arnautovo, large Soviet units attacked the column just moving on, showing the intention to isolate its avant-garde (*Tirano* battalion and *Val Camonica* group). As the struggle developed with alternate events, in order to attain its intent, the enemy was intervening with fresh forces (who were singing). The prompt reaction of the 5<sup>th</sup> Alpine was overwhelmingly assaulting the attackers and reopening the gap to the column and to the mass-gathering, now devoid of combative will, who followed it passively. The consistency of the enemy in this action was assessed at three battalions.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Alpine, near Nicholajevka, began the attack of the inhabited area guarded by the enemy. Although the efficiency of the unit was reduced due to the so-called sustained fighting, the harsh climatic conditions, food deprivations and the scarcity of ammunition, winning the violent reaction of the opponent's fire, the units overcame the railway embankment located on the eastern edge of Nicholaska, having managed to enter the town at 11:00.

But due to heavy losses could not keep it, and the units, as reinforced by other desirable elements, had to go back over the railroad, keeping contact with the enemy in it.

By midday, the bulk 5<sup>th</sup> Alpine reached the column, and the with the support of all available artillery for the resumption of the attack. Unit formations also participated in it.

The enemy, whose strength was assessed at a Division, reacted with the fire of all its units and the intervention of numerous planes. The enemy action had serious effects on the mass of the column, consisting of slides, draft animals, vehicles run by military personnel of various nationalities and of various languages, and are therefore difficult to coordinate.

The attack, with great determination, followed in the wake of the few German tanks on which the Commander of the Division had taken over, carried the unit again beyond the railroad and the second occupation in the town.

However, the serious losses suffered by the attackers, especially among the officers, provoked the temporary suspension of the operation.

The mass that followed felt the danger and began a retrograde movement.

The arrival of the 5th Alpine led to the recovery of the advance and all the men of the heterogeneous column, armed and unarmed, they rushed forward in an avalanche, sweeping away every enemy tumultuously resistance which suffered heavy losses in men, light weapons and 24 artillery pieces.

The Army Corps Commander, in view of the precarious conditions of the units, of their reduced armaments and ammunition, and in anticipation of a likely offensive return of the Russians, ordered the movement to continue after a short stop on the conquered objective, so as to overcome sooner Uspenskaja's groove, conducive to the movement of motor vehicles.

Another barrier was eliminated by the *Edolo* battalion. The Column of the *Vicenza* Division resumed at dawn in order to reach Valujki, but found the many inhabited areas of the town under guard by enemy elements. These retreated at the first mortar round, but the repeated deployment of the units caused delays in the march. The column was also often subjected to strafing by enemy planes.

Towards midday the column was taken under the rocket launch, which could not be countered. The actions of the partisans were more and more frequent; ammunition was running out.

At 15:00, the column itself, reduced to about 3,000 men, was arrested at the front by the fire of machine guns, while cavalry units, crashed by a nearby forest, appeared on the left flank. The *Pieve di Teco* battalion took position, but the shortage of ammunition allowed it only a temporary containment to the action.

Cossack cavalry, reinforced by artillery and tanks, also appeared on the rear, thus completing the encirclement.

When an enemy parliamentarian announced his terms within thirty minutes, threatening not to give quarter to prisoners, the chances not only to continue the march, but also to stand longer, were practically impossible.

The commander of *Vicenza*, as a parliamentarian, had the opportunity to assess the great consistency of the enemy forces. Accepting the surrender conditions, General Pascolini remained a prisoner, while the officers who accompanied him came back to the Italian units to report that the yield had been accepted. They had to find that the Soviets had already captured the entire column.

The two echelons of the *Cuneense* Division, just started on the march, when they were strafed from aircraft; they joined then forming a single column. An attack on cavalry units was rejected by the *Dronero* battalion. During the night march, the 1<sup>st</sup> alpine lost contact with the Division Command.

On 27 January, the Alpine Corps Command in the westward movement passed over from the *Tridentina* and the rest of the column, about 30 kilometers long. Above it, continued to fly enemy aircraft.

The march was made more and more fatigued by the abundance and the state of snow. The draft animals, exhausted, died in increasing numbers, causing the abandonment and destruction of artillery pieces or other loads. Officers and soldiers at the limit their strength stopped in the country houses, where, often, they were then captured.

The Command of the *Tridentina Division*, quickly reorganized the units in the night, had the resumption of movement, putting the 5<sup>th</sup> Alpine, *Bergamo* and *Vicenza* groups in the vanguard, and the only German tank left, with the two surviving artillery pieces also German.

With a very difficult stage of more than 40 kilometers, still subjected to aerial actions and flooded with new losses for exhaustion, the column marched through the night reaching Uspenskaja and Lutovinovo.

The *Cuneo* Division, who came to Valujki, was attacked by surprise and overwhelmed by a cavalry unit hidden behind the high embankment of the enemy line. The *Mondovì* Battalion refused to surrender and began a fight that lasted for several hours. But the struggle was unequal and the battalion eventually had to yield.

On January 28, members of the Army Corps Command were attacked by tanks and infantry. Together with the *Tridentina* units that preceded them, they marched to reach Novi Oskol.

When the column was 16-kilometer from that location came to know that it had been occupied by Russians since the morning. It was therefore necessary to change the route and head to Slonovka. The effort of the march was overcome only for the will of everyone to reach the goal.

With a temperature of -35° to -40° the number of frozen increased by the hour. The few surviving draft animals drove the sleds for the transport of the wounded and frozen.

On *January 29*, the column reached Bessarab. Its strength was reduced to 20,000 Italians, over 2,000 injured and 5,000 frozen. The number of Germans and Hungarians carried to safety was gradually reduced to 15 to 16,000 men.

On *30 January* Troolskoje Bolsce was reached, where soldiers and officers of other armies split off from the Italian column.

The moral status of the Italians was considerably raised in the finding that the critical phase of the withdraw had been overcome and in the hope of being able to enjoy the next rail transport.

In the resort town also the first lorries with the supplies; with them could begin the removal of the most seriously wounded and frozen.

The late *31st January* of the column of the Alpine Corps came to Scebekino. All staff, as they arrived, were placed in shelter where they stayed for a few days, either for a rest period, or to await the arrival of late stragglers, which lasted until February 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The worst wounded and frozen were transferred to the Karkov Italian military hospital. The others were hospitalized in a temporary infirmary, waiting to be transported to Karkov,

It was then of the units were reorganization and new clothes were handed over to the men, awaiting the transfer that would have led the remains of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army to the Gomel area, from where they would leave by railroad to return to Italy.

By January 31, the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command, surrendering the sector's responsibility to the German Lanz group, concluded all operational activities on the Russian front.

## 6. – CONSIDERATIONS

The Soviet operation for the isolation of German forces battling for Stalingrad's possession was the first of a large offensive that, extending from south to north to almost the entire theater of war, would have swept, in the course of a quarter,

the resistance of six Armies, forcing them into various pockets: the German 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armored and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian, the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian; the 2<sup>nd</sup> German.

Indeed:

- in the third week of November, simultaneously broke up the deployment of the 4<sup>th</sup> German Armored Army and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian, the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army operating in Stalingrad, the unit of the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored and the Right wing of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian;

- in the middle of December, broke the center and right wing of the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army (Italian II and XXXV Corps and the XXIX German) and overwhelmed the left of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian, the two halves were locked in a new pocket, while it had not yet eliminated the former from Stalingrad;

- in the second week of January, once again broken the newly reconstructed front of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army (XXIV German Army Corps) and broke up the deployment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army, a third pocket was built in which was the Italian Alpine Corp (left wing of the Army);

- At the beginning of February, with similar workmanship similar to the previous ones, the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army (Voronez sector) was defeated and surrounded.

Only in the second week of March the German forces succeeded in halting the enemy who, crossing the Kursk line, Belgorod, Karkov, had come up with its most advanced spearhead almost to Poltava's meridian.

The defeat of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army on the Don should therefore be considered not isolated but in the overall framework of this operational cycle and on the same level as the other armies involved and beaten by the Russian offensive, more so than its defensive organization was not certainly better than the others.

For the defensive organization of the Don line, "Directive 41" (33) on 5 April 1942 of the German Supreme Command

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(33) "Directive 41" reprinted below:

*"In order not to allow the majority of Soviet forces located to the north of the Don to go south of the river, it is important that the mass of forces moving from the Taganrog area to the east is strengthened on its right flank with a share of armored and motorized units; if necessary, they may be formed with mobile groups.*

*"In carrying out these operations, we need not only to take into account the security of the north-eastern flank, but the defensive positions on the Don have also begun. Particular importance*

established that during the offensive in the southern theater of the front (where the Italian Army was deployed);

- the north side provided safe protection to the forces operating on the main route;
- the start of defensive positions on the Don was immediately begun, attributing the same remarkable anti-tank capacity and organizing them for use in the winter season.

On the basis of that directive, the Army Group "B" Command, with a series of provisions ranging from July to December 1942, set out and reiterated the basic concepts that had to form the organization and conduct of the defense, which can be summarized as follows ;

- The forces must be projected forward to form a continuous strong resistance position as much as possible.

The enemy infiltrations, very dangerous both for the linear defense system and for the great abilities of the adversary to consolidate immediately on the occupied terrain, must be cut off at the start by launching timely counter-attack and counter-assaults;

- The defense of the Don must be made and carried out on the right bank of the river, which must form an indispensable resistance line.

Absolute exclusion of any tactical movement both for maneuvering and for the break-through of the front and consequent increased availability of forces. Such decisions can only be taken by the Army Group Command;

- in case of break-through, the lateral pillars shall not be withdrawn to allow adequate countermeasures which may be

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*must be attributed to the realization of a mighty anti-tank defense. The positions must be made taking into account their possible use in the winter season and must therefore be provided with all the necessary devices for that purpose.*

*"The manning of positions on this broad front of Don, which will expand continuously in relation to the development of operations, will be primarily entrusted to allied units in order to employ German troops to create a powerful barrier between Orel and Don as well as in the Stalingrad isthmus: some non-committed German Divisions must be arranged as a mobile reserve behind the Don's front line.*

*"Allied troops must be placed on our positions in such a way that in the north part the Hungarians are deployed, then the Italians and furthest from all, to the southeast, the Romanians".*



part of the operational reserves, unique and usable for this purpose, being the local reserves and the reinforcements generally absorbed for the defense of the line before the break. Defense elements must remain in place even if they are overcome by the enemy or are in danger of being encircled.

The application of the above-mentioned concepts within the 8<sup>th</sup> Army led to the creation of such a position of resistance only by name, as even with the total projection of all forces on line, the battalion sectors would always have been great (about 7 km per battalion) to those provided by the Italian doctrine of defense on ground wherever they can.

In such a precarious situation, the Army commanded to have a certain consistency (intervention groups) in hand to be able to oppose an adequate mass where the enemy effort had been manifested. This also at a cost to weaken the position which in fact was nothing but a reinforced safety line.

This criterion was opposed by the Army Group "B" Command, which during the revision of the winter deployment plan explicitly ordered to deflate the line of defense using the small part of the units to be held in hand.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Army, in early August 1942, had taken over from the German units sent to the Stalingrad front a wide area of about 300 kilometers, then reduced to 270.

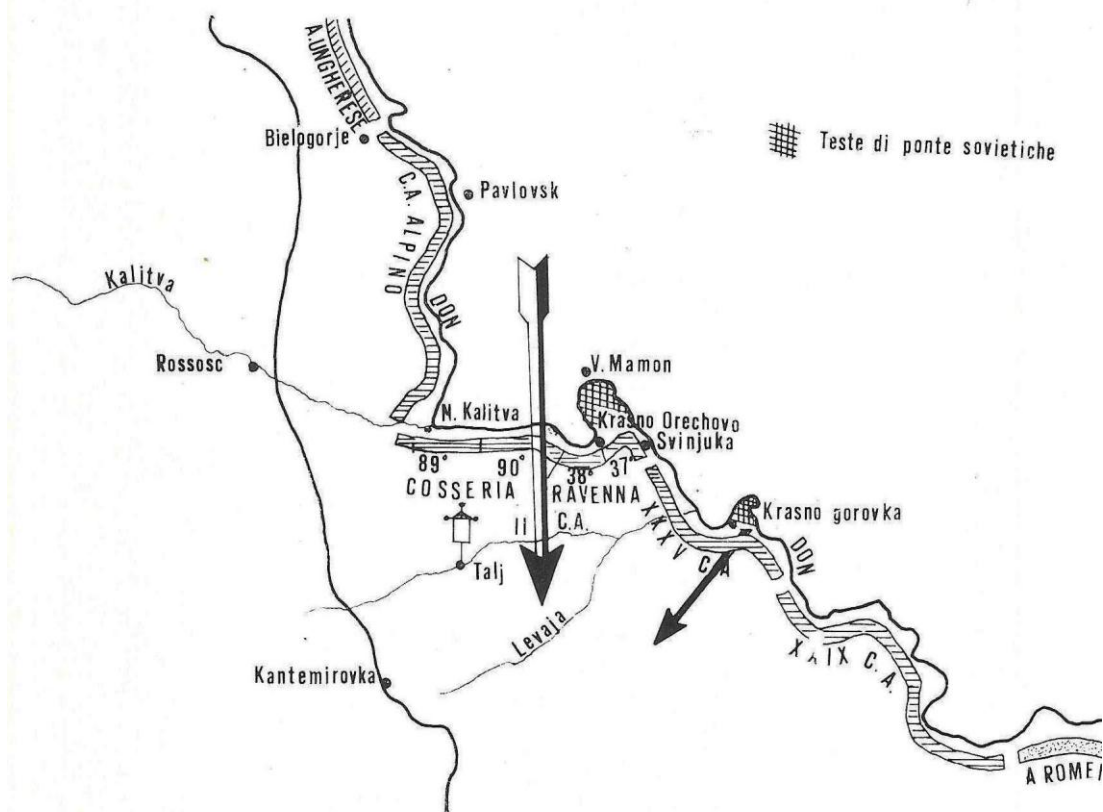
On August 16, in particular, the II Army Corps took over the positions of the German XXIX Corps which included, on the right bank of the Don, a Soviet bridgehead (about 11 km wide and a 10 km deep) between Verhnij Mamon and Niznij Mamon, whom the Germans had not eliminated during their occupation.

Another Soviet bridgehead on the Don's right was located about 30 kilometers south-east of the former, in the Krasnohorovka-Ogalev bend.

Possession of such positions by the Russians, robustly installed on the river, would then be very useful to their units in the offensive of the following December against the Italian Armed Forces.

In the Army deployment existed, then, in a particularly dangerous stretch for the defense, due to the evolution of the line, and it was the Novo Kalitva - Krasno Orekovo stretch, manned by II Corps (Divisions *Cosseria* and *Ravenna*).

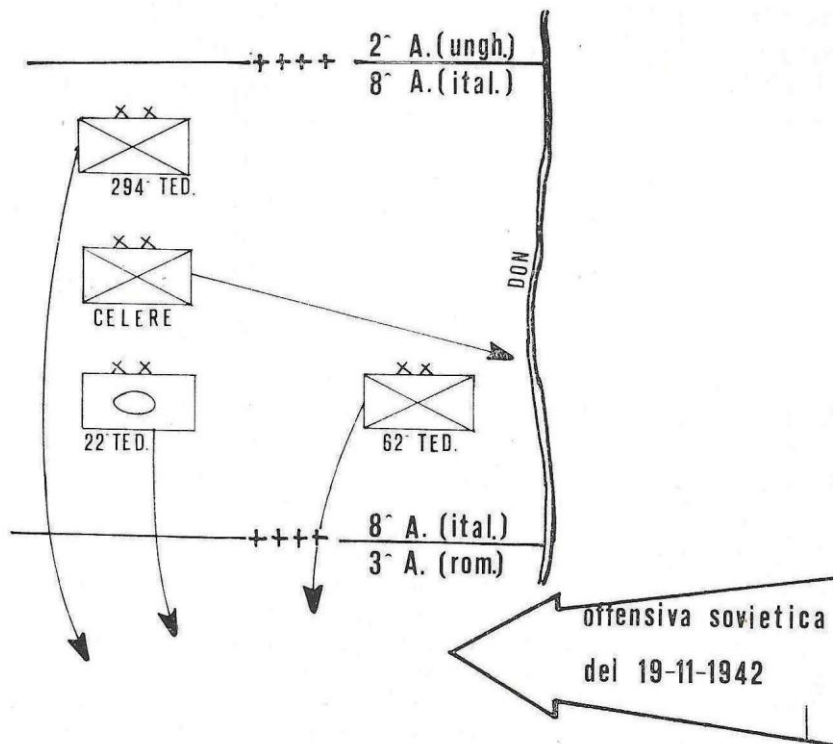
As the next sketch demonstrates, an attack on forces from north to south, coexisting with other east-south-west action departing from the positions of the "hat of Frigio", would break the front of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army by putting into serious crisis even the right wing of the deployment (as in fact it happened with the Soviet operation "Little Saturn").



The Italian Commanders had not failed to propose to the Germans in August 1942 to cut off, in full or in part, Pavlovsk-Mamon Salient, occupying with a few big units a more advanced line. The move would take away from the opponent and move to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army wide areas and good starting footsteps to cut off the counterattack from Krasno - Orekovo and Mamon's bend, but the proposal was not approved.

To weaken the already precarious Italian defensive organization on the Don contributed considerably also the separation of the Divisions

German 62<sup>nd</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> Armored and 294<sup>th</sup> located on the front of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army. Following the Soviet counter-offensive against the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army (which since October 1942 was deployed to the right of the Italian sector), the three German Grande Units were urgently transferred towards the threatened area.



Thus, the sector of the Italian Army, shortly before being invested, did not have more than one unit for the reaction of movement.

For reasons of defensive defeat as outlined herein first, there are added two more decisive incidences. The first of them concerns the defense order of the “bank of the Don”, so the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was forced to operate in a pattern that would not allow alternatives to linear static defense. The other reason for weakness of the front is included in the “employment restriction” (34) imposed by the German Command for its units sent to the sector of the 8th Army

(34) Limitation to the availability of a unit (or group of forces and means) whose use is subject to the approval of the higher authority, or is set by the authority itself for the fulfillment of a specific task.

shortly before the "Little Saturn" operation or during its operation.

The employment constraint concerned the 385<sup>th</sup> Division, the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division and the Fegelein Group. Armored vehicles of the 27<sup>th</sup> Division not only had they not been decentralized, but had been left to the Commander of the Grande Unit with full freedom of action.

The defensive arrangement of the Italian Army on the Don was the main topic of a conversation at Starobelsk on October 4, 1942 between the Commander of the Army Group "B", General von Weichs, and the Italian military representative at the German Supreme Command General Efisio Marras. During the interview the German Commander:

- Recognizes that the Italian Army was advocated a very large sector, but can be reduced by the inclusion of new Romanian units (insertion never occurred);
- shows the defiant situation of the Army in automatic weapons and anti-tank and adheres to Gen. Marras's request to procure weapons as soon as they becomes available. *"It is foreseeable - says Gen. von Weichs - that Stalingrad will fall into our hands with large arms deposits; a considerable amount of weapons has already been captured during the last operation."* The General also expresses the intention of using as strongholds, as the Russians already do, the immobilized wagons, because they are hit in the organs of movement, interposing along the defensive front and ensures that they have in mind to assign in their time to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army an adequate number of such wagons (assignment never occurred).

Gen. von Weichs later states: *"... the Führer has a particular focus on the sector of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army as a very delicate strategic point. If we were the Russians, we would consider that sector to be particularly suitable for an action on our positions. After the end of the struggle for Stalingrad, the Russians will look for other points to exert their pressure and it is possible that in the winter the Italian Army sector is a theater of major events. But - he adds - the Russians are attacking now here with strange criteria"*.

Despite the "Directive 41" and the convictions of Army Group "B" Commander on the importance and delicacy of the Don line, however, no measures were adopted to enhance their defenses.

The serious defensive conditions in which Don's front was left could probably have contributed two initial evaluations of strategic value, which were then inaccurate, of the German Supreme Command. It had in fact considered that:

- the most dangerous theater was the central one. To support the Germans' conviction of a possible winter attack on the Army Group "Center" was the intense operational activity carried out by the Soviet Kalinin and West Fronts in the summer and in the fall of 1942. The Germans, in fact, on the eve of the Soviet offensive in the southern sector, strengthened the "Center" sector with 12 Divisions and various support units (35);

- Soviet forces were nevertheless in a position to carry out massive offensive operations during the winter of 1942-1943 (36).

The German Army and with it the Allied Armies were also found at the end of autumn in a precarious situation stemming from the fact that the summer offensive not only had not achieved a resolution but was unfinished as not one of the two great objectives proposed, namely the conquest of Stalingrad

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(35) From *Voenno Istorickski; Zurnal*, n. 1, 1972, which quotes page 15 the work of ZUKOV "Vospominanja i razmyslenija", ed. 1969, where page 418 is said: "*The German Army Forces "B" and "A" were sent, in October-November only 10 divisions, half of which came at the beginning of the Volga counter-offensive*".

*"In the Soviet deception plan, however, is the order given in mid-October 1942 by Stavka to the Southern Fronts to organize itself in defense"*.

(36) "*The German intelligence service - the Soviets write in the IVOVSS - evaluated the situation on October 28 at the Army Group "B" sectors the thrust to Stalingrad: "The enemy has no intention in the near future to undertake massive offensive operations on the Don's front"*.

The then on November 12, that is, just seven days before the Soviets turned to the offensive that was to begin the overturning of the war in their favor, the Germans, still said in IVOVSS, were of the opinion that "*...the possibility of an offensive in the immediate future has not been sufficiently established. Because of this unclear situation it is not possible to determine the general operational concepts of the enemy. In order to develop large-scale operations the enemy does not have sufficient strength*".

Of the same, but less optimistic, the opinion was that Gen. Messe recorded by Ciano in this regard ("*I see Messe coming back from Russia. His judgment is that the Bolsheviks have no power to try grande actions, but sufficient to pin nearly the totality of the Germanic army in the steppes*", Diary 1939 - 1943, November 14, 1942)

and the domination of the Caucasus had been reached and the forces of the "South" sector had remained, so to speak, "in the air." The front, in fact, had assumed a disproportionate extension to the available forces, also because of the irregularity of its course due precisely to the arrest of the German offensive. This was a very difficult situation, not only because of the weakness of the front resulting from its excessive development in proportion to the forces involved, but also and above all because the German Command had reserves in an absolutely inadequate amount. It is explained how, as the Soviets took over the initiative, it was no longer in a position to face events in a timely manner.

It is also not to be ruled out that the German Command was surprised not only by an erroneous assessment of the overall situation but also by the constant underestimation of the opponent. On the one hand, his attention was drawn to the threat of major landing operations at the western front, where considerable forces (some fifty divisions) were immobilized, also due to the surprise suffered as a result of landing in northern French Africa. On the other hand, the underestimation of the possibilities of the enemy, after the first phase of the offensive that had led to the isolation of the 6th Army, led the Germans to believe that the Soviet effort was near to exhaustion. They judged it possible to unlock the Stalingrad Army, excluding important attacks in other areas, and they did not assess the magnitude of the enemy threat on the mid Don, who would at least have to make reserves, even with some difficulty, from other points (37).

The Soviet Command, on the other hand, was already organizing the attack deployment for the second phase of the offensive that began on Nov. 19, the "Little Saturn" operation. To deal with it with the certainty of success it provides among other things:

- to reinforce the "Fronts" involved in the operation with a large number of Infantry, Armored and Mechanized Grande Units (38);

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(37) *"The German Command, and Hitler in particular, were so obsessed with the prestige of the conquest of Stalingrad, who did not pay enough attention to the strengthening of the two flanks"* (ALEXANDER WERTH: "La Russia in guerra, 1941 - 1945, page 490, Mondadori, Milan, 1966).

(38) From *Voenno Istoricesleij Zurnal*, n. 12, 1972, page 52, where in a footnote is also written: *"During the development of the offensive to Stalingrad in harmony with the general strategic concepts of the winter campaign, they were reinforced with reserves taken by the Supreme Command (Stavka) also 'Fronts' operating in other Russian-German theaters. In particular, for the*

- to reinforce the "South West" Front, which had its 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Army engaged against the Italian II Army Corps, with most of the artillery reserves available to the Soviet Supreme Command and with various units ceded by others "Fronts ", including: 26 artillery regiments, 4 anti-aircraft artillery battalions, various mortar units and 10 M.30 heavy multi-rocket launchers. Within the framework of the same South East West Front, the deployment of the materials involved a total of 48 artillery regiments;
- to concentrate the mass of armored units at the main attack points (see Drawings Nos. 36 and 39);
- to support the operation with two Air Armies (2<sup>nd</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>), with 532 aircraft of various kinds, carrying out 4,177 sorties, 80% of which in support of ground units (39).

With the Operation "Little Saturn", the Soviets managed to achieve a surprise of strategic value by spreading their offensive in a theater, the southern one, and at a time, the winter, which the Germans in their forecasts had discarded and could concentrate great forces in the break through sector, chosen at the weakest point of the enemy front, having almost completely cleared the rest of the Don line.

Nonetheless, the attack did not proceed as quickly as projected in the operational plans. In fact, Gen. Radzievsky's in the *Rivista Storico Militare Sovietica* writes: "Following order no. 306 of the Commissioner for the Defense of People, the adoption of a single echelon in the deployment of all the tactical units (40) created moments of crisis in some sections of the breakthrough since neither the Regiments nor the Divisions had to reinforce or repeat the first initial crash. For example, the Divisions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Armor could not perform with their own strength the breakthrough of the first

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"Ostrogosk - Rossosc" operation (that is the operation that with the investment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army will involve the Italian Alpine Army Corps in January 1943), the Voronez Front received from Stavka the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Army, IV and the VII Cavalry Corps and many other units."

(39) From *Voenno Istoriceskij Zhurnal*, n. 11, 1972, page. 51.

(40) By this expression the Soviets mean units from platoon to the Division, inclusive.

*position and thus create the premises for the insertion of the Armored Corps into the battle. Such a drawback occurred in 6<sup>th</sup> and in the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Army during the Mid Don offensive (41).*

"The slowdown in infantry forced the commanders to enter the moving rates at the time of the battle. *This fact caused considerable losses in tanks* "(42).

From that admission, it can be inferred that all the 10 Soviet infantry divisions in the 1<sup>st</sup> rank had also suffered so serious losses that they would no longer be able to fulfill their offensive task, that is, the breakdown of the defenses of the II Corps without the use of 754 tanks of armored and motorized units concentrated on the same front.

Yet in Soviet military history stated that (43) "*... at the end of the day - that is to say December 16, 1942 - the troops of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army advanced 4 to 5 kilometers and those of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armed Guard 2 - 3 kilometers*".

These figures should be considered in relation to those in Table No. 6 of the study cited in footnote 43, which indicates the scope of the "Little Saturn" "*operation as planned and what was actually achieved*". Precisely:

#### PLANNED AND PRACTICAL AMPLIFICATION OF OPERATION LITTLE SATURN (43)

Depth of the operation in km		Duration in days		Average pace of daily progression in km				Duration of Artillery preparation (in minutes)	
				according to plan		in reality			
According to plan	In reality	According to plan	In reality	By the infantry	By the armor	By the infantry	By the armor	According to plan	In reality
220-250	150-200	6	15	30-40	55-60	10-13	20-30	90'	90'

(41) That is, the two armies who worked against the Italian II Corps

(42) Gen. Prof. A. RADZIEVSKIJ, in Voennno Istoricesleij Zurnal, n. 3, 1973.

(43) From Voennno Istoriceskij Zurnal, n. 5, 1972, page 27



For the Italian side, the conduct of the defense appears, at every level of command, strongly conditioned by the scarcity of forces.

The amplitude of the areas to be defended, excessive, as we have seen, because of the small number of the units destined to guard them, resulted in the alignment of all the units in the line, which thus found themselves not even equipped with reinforcements.

Outlined the attack, the absence of the reinforcement determined the intervention of the second-echelon units, often incomplete for providing support share to the first line. Neither the use of such units could be delayed, since the sectors not attacked could not send forces to the point invested by the enemy because this was strictly forbidden by the German Army Group "B" Command.

The establishment of "intervention groups", based on the use of second-echelon battalions reinforced by accompanying weapons, artillery and engineers, could respond to the needs arising from local attacks. When, on the other hand, the attack involved a front line defended by Grande Units, the use of intervention groups was virtually negligible not only because second-echelon units often did not exist as they were already absorbed by combat needs but even for the natural reluctance of commands to deprive the already small forces available during the offensive.

The use, in its entirety, of second-echelon, German units, which were initially non-existent, assigned late to the attacks, absorbed for shares from the contingent need of fighting power, unit per unit, could never be implemented and the total power of the units was actually canceled.

To strongly influence the conduct of the defense was also the "bond of employment" of the Germans to their units, since in order to be able to employ the units, the Italian Commander was to ask for and obtain the prior consent of the Army Group "B" Command and when the consensus was given the units concerned were no longer able to carry out the tasks entrusted to them as they were now overcome by the new situation.

In the phase of breaking the center and the right of the Army, in essence, it was not possible to oppose the organic action and maneuvering action of any Grande Unit, infantry or armor, so that the enemy could expand without to be validly hindered, the breaks he had opened in the defensive line.

The subsequent constitution of a new rearward line was difficult due to the wear and tear from the previous actions, the inadequacy of new assignment units, and the staggering of their arrival time in the area of employment.

The defense forces, however, in the precarious conditions in which they came to find themselves in the intrinsic weakness of the Don line and for the violence of the enemy attack, sprang up and carried on with a superiority in men and means that left them little time and space, very few possibilities of resistance, they knew equally to impose to the Soviets during the collapse a rate of attrition that was able to reduce the initial difference in power between attack and defense.

The slowdown in Soviet penetration, determined by the tenacity of the defense, resulted in the possibility of re-employing some of the surviving Italian units:

- defense of the right flank of the northern wing of the Italians remaining on the Don: Division by the *Cosseria* in the sector of the Alpine Army Corps;
- the concentration of the German units in turmoil for the reconstruction of a rearward line to the west of Don:

- Julia* Division in the sector of the German XXIV Armored Army Corps;
- Reinforcement of the resistance islands set up south of the German XXIV Corps: *Torino* Division and elements of the *Ravenna* at Tcertkovo, elements of the Air Force at Gartmicevska, voluntary elements in Millerovo;
- the protection of the Vorosilovgrad logistics center and the bridges on the Denez and, subsequently, another sector on the Denez (*Ravenna* Division).

The collapse of the Alpine Corps, left without a plausible character on the Don's line not only when it was isolated from the south, but even when the breakout obtained by the Soviets against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army had isolated it to the north, it was too much belatedly authorized by the German Command.

The retreat of the alpine was therefore in very difficult conditions, with foot units constantly overwhelmed by Soviet motorized units, opposing a series of barriers that they could only partially break. In fact, the Divisions *Julia*, *Cuneense* and *Vicenza* were almost entirely in the hands of the opponent, while the only *Tridentine* Division managed to escape the encirclement.

The causes of the defeat of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, in relation to what has been said, are therefore mainly four: the excessive breadth, in relation to the available forces, of the sector to be defended; the total absence of reserves; the order imposing the rigid defense of Don's line; the relationship between the forces and the means in the field, definitely in favor of the Soviets.

The magnitude of the sector to be defended, 270 km from Kamilschova to Vescenskaja, was excessive both in the absolute sense, that is to say, the entire Grande Unit that could deploy on average a division every 30 km of front, and in a relative sense if you consider that the only sector of the II Army Corps (Division of *Cosseria* and *Ravenna*), chosen by the Soviets for the attack, had an amplitude even greater than 60 km. By comparing such amplitudes with those indicated in Italian military doctrine of the time, which set the sector to be defended in an Infantry Division at 3 to 5 km, is in which difficult conditions the Army has dealt with the battle.

The total lack of reserves after the departure of the German divisions 294<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> Armored and 62<sup>nd</sup> made the deep penetration of Soviet armored units and the turning of the right wing inevitable.

The German command of Don's rigid defense forced the Army to operate according to a scheme that, excluding any alternative to linear static defense, not only offered the opponent the opportunity to choose anywhere the sector in which to launch its own attack, but predominantly prevented the units deployed in the lateral sectors to aid with the arresting action.

A key element of defense, according to Army Group B orders, was the resistance in place on the shore of Don, so that the Germans would have time to run to conduct the so-called "*counter-attack liberation*."

The fact that the events took place demonstrated, however, that the Italian units, lying on the river bank, were worn out and destroyed by the preponderance of the Soviet forces that were concentrated against them.

The arrival of the German units for counter attack liberation was in most cases either inadequate or, in any event, late.

The ratio of the forces in the field, as traced in the page 331 table, is already in itself eloquent, in the evidence of the figures, to affirm the overwhelming superiority of Soviet attackers on Italian defenders.

However, it is necessary to add that if some force relations - such as infantry battalions (5.75 to 1) and artillery

(6.13 to 1) - they enter the norm of Soviet military doctrine that want a superiority for its attacking devices of 4-6 to 1 (superiority, however, is always greater than the traditional one of 3 to 1), for the other attacking forces - such as the battalions of tanks (15 to 1), the tanks (15.51 to 1), the multiple rocket launchers (200 to zero) and medium and heavy mortars (11.6 to 1) - the a report in favor of the Soviets appears to be so large that it is rarely found in other battles. If you evaluate, for example, the only destructive power (see Note 12) of multiple rocket launchers deployed on the front of the attack, without considering the fire of mortars, artillery and aircraft, it is best to evaluate the desperate combat engagement of the Italian units were in the five days of the attrition phase, December 11-15, and most of all on the 16th, 17th, and 18th of the breakthrough of the front, when the sacrifice in place, after to the consignment, of entire units assumed the aspects dramatic of the conscious holocaust, consumed stoically without hope of victory.

Extreme losses in men, weapons and means (see chapter XIX):

- fallen and missing: 3,010 officers on 7,130; 81,820 non-commissioned officers, graduates and soldiers, on 221,875;
- wounded and frozen: altogether, 29,690;
- draft animals: 80%;
- motor vehicles: 70%;
- motorized means: 87%;
- unit armaments: 76% (approx.);
- artillery of various caliber: 97%.

The Soviet attack did not engage, with overwhelming superiority of forces and means, only the first line, whose defenders had the task of resisting in place and not to retreat but disrupted the whole area of the battle with aerial, artillery, mortars and heavy rocket launchers, destroying commands, connecting networks, automotive units and all forms of operational and logistic activity.

In this situation, it was not possible to break the contact with the relentless adversary and it was not possible to organize self-styling for the retrograde movement, also because most of the vehicles were not close to the first line.

The unblocking of units under enemy pressure was influenced by the precariousness of the situation, the difficulties or the impossibility of communicating with higher or lateral commands, resulting in shortage of orders and news.

Neither did the truck units of the Quartermaster have the time and the way to run and to find the withdrawing units, since it would be movements of the order of hundreds of kilometers, carried out in a fluid situation (which did not exclude the total or partial capture of the truck convoys) and without a precise plan regarding the itineraries and the destination.

Of the 15,750 vehicles in the Army on the eve of the battle, 11,139 were lost, of which 9,818 of the operating units and 1,321 of the Quartermaster truck units. There were also lost 4,443 motorized means on 4,851 existing.

The huge losses are attributed to: destruction or capture battle during; destruction by the same units that had been equipped with vehicles to prevent them falling into enemy hands; abandoned for mechanical failure; abandoned due to lack of fuel (the main cause of the losses).

## CHAPTER XVI

### REORGANIZING THE UNITS AND TRANSFER IN THE COLLECTION AREAS FOR REPATRIATION

The problem of reorganizing the units worn during the defensive battle of December 1942 and the subsequent repatriation came immediately after the high percentage of losses suffered by the divisions.

The Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, as of 19 December, assigned to that function the Command of the II Corps who was soon replaced in operational responsibility by the Command of the German XXIV Armored Corps.

The reorganization operations can be divided into two periods:

1<sup>st</sup> - from December 20 to December 31, with the orientation to bring as soon as possible units in line, carried out immediately on the rear of the operating units, essentially from the II Army Corps;

2<sup>nd</sup> - January 1st, when, after the outflow of the constituent units of the right wing of the Army (XXXV Corps - CSIR and Italian units of the German XXIX Army Corps) and later the Alpine Army Corps, there was a serious loss of staff and materials, which made it impossible to get ready for reorganization.

The unfavorable trend of the general situation on the Russian front, imposing further shifts west of the reorganization zone and the facilities of the Quarter master, made it increasingly slow and complex by the operations undertaken.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> PERIOD.

The units withdrawn from the combat zone for the course taken by the operations were divided into two blocks (*Document No. 121*):

- *Voroscilovgrad area*: Command of the II Army Corps, *Ravenna* Division (except the Capizzi Group, confederated on the 298<sup>th</sup> German Division), elements of the *Cosseria* Division, Troops and Services of the Army Corps and Army. In addition, there were also units belonging to the XXXV Army Corps -CSIR;

- *Rossosc area*: *Cosseria* Division (except the elements of the 90<sup>th</sup> infantry confined to Voroscilovgrad), a units of the *Ravenna* and previously assigned reinforcement units.

Consistency of the two blocks:

		Area	Area
		Voroscilovgrad	Rossosc
Troops and Services of the Army	Men	2,800	500
Troops and Services of II Corps	“	6,400	800
Troops and Services of the XXXV Corps	“	4,200	-
<i>Ravenna</i>	“	6,300	1,000
<i>Cosseria</i>	“	3,300	4,300
<i>Sforzesca</i>	“	1,700	-
<i>Pasubio</i>	“	1,200	-
<i>Torino</i>	“	400	-
3 <sup>rd</sup> <i>Celere</i>	“	2,100	-
CC.NN.	“	2,000	-
Total	Men	30,400	6,600

As far as armaments were concerned, the deficiencies were serious for the Infantry units (light machine guns, machine guns, mortars of 45 and 81, 47/32 pieces), almost total for divisional artillery, total for Army Corps and Army artillery.

The draft animals of the combat baggage were almost completely missing.

The cars were reduced to a limited number.

On December 26, the Army Command issued the first provisions for the reorganization of the units (*Document n. 122*).

The *Ravenna* Division, as of December 24, had taken over the bridges of Donez at Voroscilovgrad, with a small armament with heavy deficiency of heavy weapons.

The *Cosseria* Division, in the last days of December, took position in the second echelon in the area between Rovenki and Beloluzkaja, to integrate the sparse deployment of the German XXIV Corps and give security to the right flank of the Alpine Corps.

On 30 December, in view of the difficulties of the provision in Vorosilovgrad, the Army Command decided to leave in that city only the units that could be readily re-employed in operational tasks (a Bersaglieri battalion, a special motorized unit, artillery units, Engineers and chemists of the Army, two battalions of CC.NN.); to clear the units for which it would have been necessary for a longer period of reorganization (Troops and Services of the II Army Corps and the *Sforzesca* Division in Rykovo; Troops and Services of the XXXV Army Corps, *Pasubio* Divisions, Torino and 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere*, at Gorlovka). The Divisions *Ravenna* and *Cosseria*, while remaining in the said deployment areas with operational tasks, would continue the reorganization operations.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> PERIOD.

The return to the lines of units withdrawn with the *south block* (see Chapter XV: Command of the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR, *Sforzesca* Division, part of the *Pasubio* Divisions and 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere*) made the problem of reorganization more complicated, which would be continued in the locations planned in the Donez area.

The assessment of the losses suffered by these Grande Units and the isolation situation in which the forces still besieged in Tcertkovo were still in force, prompted the Army Command to provide, from January 9, that only the *Ravenna* and *Cosseria* Divisions would summarize the formations suitable for operational use (two infantry regiments with only two battalions, plus a reinforcement machine gun battalion).

However, the reorganization operations were interrupted by the Command of Army Group "B" to move the units from the Donez to the Izjum - Lozovaja - Merefa area, located about 250 kilometers northwest, not far from city of Karkov.

The Army Command, January 15; imparting executive orders, excluding the *Ravenna* Division, which was still engaged in operations on the Donez.

On 16 January, however, the Command of the Army Group B had a new transfer from the previously mentioned area, to Neshin - Tchernigov - Bachmatc, located 400 kilometers further north - west.

The movement would have to be run by rail, with empty trains returning, integrating with that of complement in



arriving from Italy and transferring parts of the Quarter master and Army Command, still engaged in Kupjansk in operations.

The Army Command entrusted to the II Corps Command, remaining in the Donez area, the task of organizing and arranging the movement of the units and committing to the Command of XXXV Corps - CSIR the order to move to the destination zone to regulate the inflow of the units and arrange for their movement and arrangement, in agreement with the local German authorities. It also provided for the establishment of an Quarter Master Delegation with a Staging Command for the organization and operation of the Services.

The deferral of transport that occurred daily in the vain waiting for the German authorities to allocate the railways, as a result of the aggravation of the operational situation in Donetsk, where the Soviet offensive directly threatened Vorosilovgrad and Izjum, forced the Command of the II Corps to take appropriate measures to prevent the units gathered in the Rykovo - Gorlovka area (about 30,000 men) involvement.

On 22 January, the movement was started by ordinary route on Dniepropetrovsk, in order to implement rail transport from more rearward stations.

On the same day, the Command of the Army Group "B" Command informed that the planned rail transport was abolished and determined to carry out ordinary movements on the route through Karkov - Ahtyrka - Romny, which in the first part, among other things was the combat line.

It would also have been a shift of about 800 kilometers, ordinarily, which would have required, because of the season, 40 to 50 days of driving.

In order to save at least some of the units such a long and heavy transfer, the Army Command demanded from the Germans the assignment of a rail transport:

- for the *Ravenna* Division, disengaged from operational tasks only on January 23 and moving to Rykovo;
- for the *Cosseria* Division and the Mounted Regimental Group, which arrived in the Izjum area after having traveled 250 kilometers by road;
- for the units of complements were collected at Izjum.

On 27 January the Command of the Army Group "B" Command responded negatively, but the Army insisted on obtaining at least

the carrying out of rail transport from the most rearward zone. Awaiting the answer, on January 28, the units began moving to Karkov.

Meanwhile, the units that had embarked on the Dniepropetrovsk movement overcoming the difficulty of moving on only one route, with very low automotive and deficient fuel assignments, were granted some empty return trains.

The lack of an organic plan for these shifts, occasionally granted and communicated in the imminence of their performance, resulted in fragmentation between the units and new difficulties in the work of reorganization.

At the end of January, the remains of the *Torino* Division, with other nuclei joined to it, and those of the Alpine Corps, ceded to the Germans the operational responsibility of the sector, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was so articulated:

- *North block*: remains of the Alpine Corps (essentially the *Tridentine* Division and units of the Army Corp and Quarter Master) with about 16,000 men and 2,500 draft animals;

- *Central block*: *Cosseria* Division, Mounted Regimental Group, alpine complements, units of the Quarter Master, with about 9,000 men, 2,500 horses, 130 vehicles;

- *south block*: Divisions *Sjorzesca*, *Ravenna*, *Pasubio*, *Torino*, 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere*, part of the *Cosseria*, Troops and Services of the II and XXXV Army Corps, units of the Quarter Master, with about 65,000 men, 300 horses, 1,500 vehicles, scattered in a wide area from Donez's mineral basin to Dniepropetrovsk.

According to the Army's request to the Army Group "B" Command, the movement should have been made by rail from the north and central blocks, ordinarily road movement by the south block.

Otherwise, the trains were not assigned, and the Soviets, overcoming the German defenses on the Oskol River, threatened to wrap the whole Donez mineral basin from the north, having been on Izjum - Slavjansk road since February 1st. At the same time, south of the Kupjansk - Karkov roadway, threatening this city.

Bearing in mind the situation, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command was left to make the immediate move of the three blocks to the west, with the execution of ordinary road movement.

On February 5, the Army Group "B" Command arranged that the units of the south block move on the route Novo Moskovsk - Krasnograd - Poltava - Senkof - Petski - Romny - Priluki - Neshin, located to the west of the previously planned. But the advancement of Soviet forces made this too insecure, and therefore the movement was carried out on the Dniepropetrovsk - Kremenciug - Pirjatin - Priluki route, although the route was further stretched.

While it was in the course westbound movement of the *south block*, the last bundle of it, fully motorized, consisting of several units around the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri regiment, also referred to as the "Carloni column" (1), on February 8, remained without fuel at Pavlograd. The II Army Corps, from Dniepropetrovsk, was unable to supply it promptly so that it could continue. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, following the news of the fall of Lozovaja into Soviet hand and enemy advancing south, in the town of Pavlograd, the local German military authority proclaimed the state of alarm. The 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri commander, with all the columns in his orders, was assigned to the dependencies of the German Command of Dniepropetrovsk, assuming the command of the Italian and German forces deployed at Pavlograd for the defense of the locality and the communication paths to it.

From 10 to 20 February, working alone or in conjunction with German forces, the "Carloni column" supported clashes with Soviet motorized and armored forces, as well as against partisans in the same city of Pavlograd.

In the area of Pavlograd, the Italian forces provided the last assistance to the Germans on the Russian front; the Army Command, knowing that the reorganization area would be moved 200 kilometers northwards to the Hungarian units, signaled to the Command of the Army Group "B" the sacrifices that would result from the units and the disadvantages for the organization and operation of services (*Document No 123*); but nothing could be achieved, as the destination in the Gomel- Klinzy-Shlobin area was confirmed.

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(1) Command and company command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri, a Bersaglieri battalion of the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri, a Bersaglieri battalion formation of the Cosentino, II Group of the 17th artillery regiment of the *Sforzesca* Division, XIX anti-aircraft artillery group. Total Armament: 35 light machine gun, 22 machine guns, 3 mortars of 81 mm., 2 -47/32 anti-tank guns, 11 - 20 mm. anti-aircraft guns, 5 anti-aircraft guns of 75/46. Complete armament, strong stockpile of ammunition.

In February, executing executive orders, the Army Command applied to the German authorities for trains, fuel, food and better accommodation conditions. In the meantime, it obtained from the Italian Supreme Command to retain some troop trains to carry out the railway transport of the units.

For their part, the II and XXXV Corps of the Army, with the available vehicles, organized the transfer of units and, after pressing and demanding contacts, received rail transport assignments (often made up of unheated cars or even flat beds) and fuels.

In this way the walking movement was lightened to the benefit of most of the remaining units. Only the mounted grouping and the baggage of the *Cosseria* Division had to carry out the whole movement on an ordinary basis.

On March 6th, what remained of the 8th Army was practically collected in the new area, except for part of the Quarter Master and units with draft animals.

The Gomel area was difficult to accommodate units due to the insufficient capacity of housing and the damage suffered by the city. The presence of German commands and units, occupied broadly in the best buildings, complicated the solution of the problem.

The reorganization operations could now be resumed, now oriented to further stay in that operation theater only of the II Corps Division. (*Document 124*).

As soon as the units of the Alpine Corps had reached the Gomel area, their repatriation began. The departures lasted from 6 to 15 March and arrivals in Italy were terminated on the 24<sup>th</sup> of the same month.

Even the XXXV Corps - CSIR was intended to be fully repatriated, but it would be a very limited practical implementation measure. The staff of any rank who did not participate in the operational cycle 1941-1942 (and that was not a significant number) and were in good physical condition would be transferred to the units of the II Corps to remain in order to fill the Staff Regulations laid down (*Document No 125*).

In this way the affluence of complements from Italy would have been smaller, but it is easy to understand with what spirit in the theater of operations those who, escaped death, wounds, and freezes, saw their comrades return to their homeland, to whom

the medical selection was bestowed. Likewise, the materials still available would be transferred to the II Corps.

In essence, the Flags, the Grande Unit Commands and the physically disabled personnel would leave for repatriation, although not so much to require hospitalization.

At 24:00 on March 25, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command relinquished to the Command of the II Corps its authority over the Italian Armed Forces in Russia.

By March 27, organic orders had been executed and the strength of the II Corps was thus divided:

	Officers	Troops
Command, Troops and Services of the Corps.	480	11,500
<i>Ravenna</i> Division	400	9,600
<i>Cosseria</i> Division	420	9,050
Quarter Master	<u>560</u>	<u>8,500</u>
Total	1,860	38,650

On March 30, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command moved to Karkov to repatriate.

At the end of March the situation of rail transport carried out or was in progress for units destined to return to Italy was:

- trains departing transporting personal: 28;
- trains departing conveying draft animals: 7;
- Total force carried, about men: 50,000;
- total draft animals transported: 2,000.

Another 10,000 men and materials of the Quarter Master were moved out of the areas of Gomel, Pervomajsk and Stalino.

The departure from White Russia had been so articulated:

- by Klinzy: 1,500 men of the 23 *Marzo* CC.NN group;
- from the Shlobin - Buda - Usa area: 16,000 men and 1,000 draft animals of the Alpine Army Corps;
- from the Gomel area: 15,000 men and 1,000 draft animals of the mounted unit, artillery groups and engineers of the army;
- from the Bobruisk - Talka Marmogorka area: 10,000 men of the XXXV Army Corps;

- from the Gomel-Novo Beliva - Restsciza area.: 8,000 Men of the Quarter Master;
- from the Dniepropetrovsk - Pervomajsk area: 9,500 men of the Quarter Master;
- from the Lviv area: 1,500 men;
- from the Kiev area: 500 men of Troops of the Army.

The Italian Supreme Command and the Army General Staff, for the sake of information received, had determined, in the meantime, that the II Corps also came to Italy. It made the necessary agreements with the German Supreme Command, on April 12 the Chief of the General Staff General gave notice of this resolution (*Document No. 126*).

On 22 April, the executive provisions for rail transport were enacted and set the date of 26 April for the start of the movement.

The departures from Gomel were completed for the entire Army on 22 May.

## PART FOUR

### ACTIVITIES OF THE COURT AND RELIGIOUS ASSISTANCE





## CHAPTER XVII

### ACTIVITY OF THE MILITARY WAR CRIMES TRIBUNAL TO FOLLOW THE CSIR AND THE 8<sup>TH</sup> ARMY (1)

#### THE CSIR MILITARY WAR CRIMES TRIBUNAL.

By a notice of June 30, 1941 (in the *Official Gazette* 11 July 1941, No.162), a military war tribunal was established at the Command of the transportable Army Corps, which from 16 July 1941 assumed the denomination of "Military War Tribunal of the Expeditionary Corps in Russia (CSIR)".

The activity of this tribunal lasted for about a year, until July 3, 1942, when the last hearing was held.

During this period, 671 complains against CSIR soldiers (635 of whom were graduates and troops, 12 of NCOs and 24 of officers), 439 convictions (418 against rank and army troops, 5 against non commissioned officers and 16 against officers).

Death sentences were two (one for the offense of murder of a Russian and for the offense of desertion), but they were not executed due to the transfer of the prison sentence.

On several occasions, the Commander of CSIR took advantage of the power conferred by art. 245 of the Criminal Military Criminal Code, to revoke the criminal case already filed: this was in relation to 23 proceedings, and exclusively against graduates and military troops.

The CSIR War Crimes Tribunal was primarily aware of offenses of absence from service, while offenses against military discipline committed during the period (July 1941 - July 1942) were of a small numerical magnitude.

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(1) Text drawn up by the Military General Prosecutor of the Republic at the Supreme Military Tribunal.

Among the offenses of absence from the service the most frequent hypothesis was the desertion outside the presence of the enemy (82 proceedings, 76 of which were against rank and soldiers, 5 against NCO, and 1 against a officer): This proves that, in most cases, the commission of military offenses was not caused by fear of the danger of clashing with the enemy or, however, of the intention to escape the fight.

This consideration is of particular relevance to the overall assessment of the behavior of Italian troops in Russia, when it is considered that the index of delinquency in relation to the number employed was minimal and never exceeded 1%.

#### THE MILITARY WAR TRIBUNAL OF THE 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY.

By a notice of 15 July 1942 (*Official Gazette* of July 22, 1942, No. 171), the CSIR War Military Tribunal was abolished, and the military war tribunal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was simultaneously established.

The proceedings pending - at the date of the announcement - in front of the CSIR War Crimes Tribunal were passed to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, expressly foreseeing the validity of the acts of institution already completed and of any possible referral.

Without prejudice to the provisions relating to the competence of the Army military tribunals, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army were assigned the knowledge of offenses committed outside the territory of the State - even before the establishment of the Army - by persons belonging to commands, units or services of that of the Major Units, or its dependents.

The activity of this tribunal lasted until April 30, 1943, the date of the suppression by a notice of 24 April 1943 (*Official Gazette* of 6 May 1943, No. 105)

In this period of time, less than two months from the CSIR court's running time, judicial activity nearly tripled (2).

In fact, they filed 1,889 denunciations against military personnel belonging to the "Army", of whom 1,843 were full of graduates and troops, 20 by non commissioned officers, 26 by officers.

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(2) *Historical Office of the General Staff* Note. - The force at the Russian front had gone from 62,000 men of the CSIR to 229,005 men of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, an increase of 369%. Therefore, the judicial activity of the period was lower than that of the previous period.

In the proceedings, 743 convictions were issued (725 against rank and military troops, 6 against non-commissioned officers, 3 against officers).

The death penalty sentences were three, all for the offense of desertion in the presence of the enemy (Article 144 of the Penal Code), but were not executed - as in the previous period - because of the capital punishment imprisonment.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Army Commander decided to use the power to revoke the criminal prosecution already filed in relation to 46 proceedings, and exclusively against graduates and military troops.

665 litigious proceedings were sent, by jurisdiction, to other courts.

Among the offenses of absence from the service, the most frequent hypothesis still resulted in the descent out of the presence of the enemy, a crime for which 255 cases were initiated, all with rank and military troops (and this was different from what happened in the operation of the CSIR court, during which the offense in question was also contested by 5 non-commissioned officers and officers).

While the CSIR tribunal did not impose any condemnation for the offense of desertion in the presence of the enemy, the court of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was judged by that court and six convictions were imposed, three of which - as mentioned - were sentenced to death.

During the period in question (July 1942 - April 1943), the number of offenses against military discipline also increased due to the increased discomfort and the difficulties arising from known war events; during this period there have also been cases of almost non-existent criminals in the past, such as episodes of injured infirmity, abandonment of places, violation of delivery, defamation of the Armed Forces, denigration of the war.

#### THE MILITARY TRIAL OF WAR OF THE II ARMY CORPS.

With the abolition of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Military War Tribunal, the proceedings pending on May 1, 1943 were devolved to the military war crimes tribunal of the II Army Corps, set up by the April 24, 1943 (in *Official Gazette* 6 May 1943, No. 105) starting from 1 May 1943-

This tribunal worked for just a month and was abolished with the call of May 30, 1943 (*Official Gazette* of June 5, 1943, No. 130) from 1 June 1943: the proceedings pending

that date was given to the Territorial War Military Tribunal in Turin.

During this period, 849 complaints were filed against military personnel belonging to the II Corps, of which 768 were against soldiers and troops, 42 against noncommissioned officers and 39 against officers; in the relevant proceedings, 125 convictions were issued (14 against graduates and troops, 11 against non-commissioned officers).

With regard to the offenses of absence from service, the court initiated 177 proceedings for desertion outside the presence of the enemy (173 against ranks and soldiers and 3 against non-officers); no condemnation was inflicted for the crime of desertion in the presence of the enemy.

A significant increase occurred in the number of offenses against military discipline and for military defeatism; because of the permanent discomfort and the increased difficulties associated with the trend of hostilities.

At the Turin War Military Tribunal, 692 proceedings were passed on by jurisdiction: this phenomenon is obviously due to the fact that the II Army Corps Tribunal worked for a very short period of time.

#### JUDICIAL ACTIVITIES AGAINST THE LOCAL POPULATION.

Judicial activity against Russian citizens from the CSIR war military tribunals, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and the II Corps was, from a quantitative point of view, absolutely marginal to the overall activity of these tribunals.

The type of crime committed by Russian citizens is not very wide. The most frequent assumptions consist of the offense of theft (30 proceedings, 26 convictions) and assistance in thefts from the military administration (29 proceedings, 20 convictions), while numerically irrelevant are the other assumptions of the offense: slander (one procedure, defined as revocation of the criminal offense under Article 245 of the Penal Code); political defamation (a single process, defined by absolution); assistance in illicit barter (4 proceedings, 2 convictions); threats (only one procedure, defined by sentence of conviction); offense to an official public (only one procedure, sentence); insulting to the Armed Forces (one procedure, one sentence).

The penalties imposed on Soviet citizens were never higher than the five-years of imprisonment.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### RELIGIOUS ASSISTANCE

The Armed Forces Officers foresee the presence of worship ministers in the various units for the exercise of religious assistance to the soldiers who wish to enjoy it.

Since the vast majority of the population professes the Catholic religion, these ministers belong to the Catholic clergy.

At the Russian front, the numerical ratio between the force present and the military chaplains was about one in a thousand, with a maximum frequency at health units (healthcare units, field hospitals, reserve hospitals, convalescents, hospital trains ). Among the units operating had a military chaplain all the units at the regiment level, but a chaplain was assigned to certain battalions called to operate isolated, such as the alpine, or intended to provide reinforcements to other units (sappers battalions, engineers, machine guns).

The chaplains were not really part of the military personnel, but they had the status of *militarized personnel*, as well as other auxiliary categories present in the commands and units.

It was attributed the likelihood of the Lieutenant's degree to the Chaplains who performed their work in the units; to the Captain's degree for those of the Large Unit Commands (divisions, Corps, Armies). These not only disengaged the functions of religious assistance for the smaller units whose staff did not foresee the presence of the Chaplain, but also exercised a directive function on their confreres operating in the units framed in the same Larger Unit.

The ordinary task of the military chaplains consisted in securing religious practice to the soldiers who intended to follow it, celebrating the Mass of Sunday or other feasts of precept, administering the Sacraments, also carrying out personal practices with the clergy of the parishes of the national territory.

During the stay of the units on the combat line, the chaplains went to visit the units that were deployed, adapting to the circumstances the celebration of religious functions,

depending on the faculties received from their ecclesiastical superiors, in harmony with the possibilities granted by the operational situation.

On the days of more intense combat activities, the chaplain carried out his action where it felt most necessary. It was often the case that, to promptly provide assistance to the wounded and dying, the chaplain, the only disarmed among the fighters, followed the wave of the assailants, ready to help the needy without distinction of nationality, as an expression of a surviving brotherhood feeling among the contenders.

In the action ranges, or after the end of it, the Chaplain, along with the donors and in cooperation with them, traced back the battlefield for the search and collection of the injured who could not move on their own, to the identification and transport of the bodies of the fallen then providing for their burial and recording of the useful data for the future detection of their burials. It also collected the personal belongings of the fallen, so that they could be delivered to the families.

At the health units, the chaplains action took place in a similar way to the one used in other hospitals, although in days of more intense operational activity the care of the injured at the places of dressing and their subsequent affluence in the places of care make the job easier.

There were two hundred military chaplains at the Russian front, during the maximum period of time (August-December 1942), as the posts foreseen by the staff were almost completely covered.

Fifty-six of them did not return:

- fallen in combat: 10;
- missing: 20;
- deceased as prison of war: 23;
- deceased as places of care: 3.

The percentage of losses is therefore 28%.

Many of the chaplains volunteered to share the captivity as prisoners of war of the intractable wounded who could not escape the advance of the enemy: 24 of them belonged to field hospitals, 1 health unit, and 1 at a reserve hospital.

Considering that, throughout the entire Second World War, the Army lost overall on all fronts of war 160 Military chaplains, it is concluded that the 56 chaplains fallen to the Russian front make up 35% of the total, that is, the strongest group of losses, compared to those on other fronts where the number of them was greater.

The first to fall into combat was the Chaplain of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri regiment, during the Christmas battle (December 26, 1941).

After sharing with the Bersaglieri all the events of the struggle, which began the previous day, it was clear that a wound left isolated outside the lines called for help, although other attempts to save them had already caused losses, he was running to help them, continuing to move forward, though he was hit in his side. Mortally wounded a second time, he managed to reach the dying and to die near them.

The valiant Chaplain was the Carmelite Father Giovanni Mazzoni, who was the voluntary Chaplain of the First World War in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry regiment of Arezzo, decorated with silver medal and bronze medal at the military value in 1916, gold medal and medal of bronze in 1917. A second gold medal was decreed in his memory.

He was succeeded by Don Giacomo Davoli, who fell in combat after just one month later (January 25, 1942).

Don Felice Stroppiana, Chaplain of the "81<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment Torino" was decorated with gold medal in memory.

Although he was devoid of an eye, he had been able to be used as a combat unit and to avoid repatriation followed by declaration of unfitness for service; caused by his lesser physical fitness.

During the second defensive battle of Don on December 16, 1942, he was riding on the front lines to encourage the infantry to perform their duty fully, remaining in the exposed position even though he was injured.

Recognizing the urgent necessity of ammunition, he rushed to go to solicit arms supplies, returning immediately to the line of fire.

Re-hit, he refused to be transported to a nursing home, and as he went to help a wounded, a mortar hit him for the third time in his head, cutting off his generous existence.

These valiant chaplains characteristically symbolize the spirit of human solidarity and Christian charity that has always animated all their brothers, called to exercise priestly ministry on the fronts of the war and to bring the comfort of faith to the faithful, to help the wounded on the field of battle and administer the last rights to those to whom the cruelty of the armed struggle took away the supreme good of life.

## PART FIVE

### THE LOSSES. THE AWARDS TO THE FLAGS





## CHAPTER XIX

## THE LOSSES

Units and Operational Phase	The Fallen and missing			The wounded and frozen		
	Officers	NCO Graduated Soldiers	Total	Officers	NCO Graduated Soldiers	Total
<i>Units of the CSIR, from 5 August 1941 to July 30 1942</i>	97	1,695	1,792	348	7,510	7,858
<i>Celere Division, in the Battle of Serafimovic (July 30 - August 13 1942)</i>	11	240	251	42	908	950
<i>Units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, in the defensive battle of the Don (August 20 - 1 September 1942)</i>	139	2,565	2,704	207	4,005	4,212
<i>Units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, from 2 September to 10 December 1942</i>	19	242	261	30	542	572
<i>Units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> defensive battle of the Don (11 December 1942 - 20 February 1943)</i>	3,010	81,820	84,830	1,290	28,400	29,690

On the serious losses of the 2<sup>nd</sup> defensive battle of Don and subsequent retirement, the following considerations can be formulated.

The forces present and operating at the beginning of the battle totaled 229,005 men.

From this figure the number of wounded and frozen repatriates, equal to 29,690 people, remains 199,315 fighters between the front line and the rear area.

At the end of the battle and after the withdrawal of the units from the Don to the Donez at Gomel, at the collection centers for repatriation, 84,830 men missing altogether, ie more than one third of the total force of the Army. The survivors were therefore 114,485.

Ultimately by the month of May 1943, survivors' repatriation operations remained in Poland: the Italian garrison in Lviv, consisting of a rearguard command, with its own command of stage, coming back to Italy in the following June; an Italian transport liaison office, with an employee military station command, dissolved on August 22, 1943.

Of the 84,830 missing men in the retreat, the USSR returned 10,030 prisoners, as evidenced by the Office of the Italian Delegate at the UN Special Commission for Prisoners of War in a brochure published in 1958 (1).

The number of 8<sup>th</sup> Army fighters who have not returned to Italy from the Russian front is therefore 74,800.

Nobody, neither on the Italian side nor on the Soviet side, was able to indicate the number of deaths and the number of missing persons in this figure. Not even the Germans with whom the Italian units operated have ever provided information on it.

Historical diaries, reports, commands, and units, compiled during or immediately afterward, do not explicitly mention it, but they are all consistent in pointing out how highly the number of dead in combat on the Don line is high in the struggle sustained from December to January 31, first in the preliminary combat and of attrition, then during the breakdown of the forehead and penetration in depth.

From the overall reading of these documents, the main causes of the losses were:

- the resistance in place, imposing the sometimes sacrificial total of strongpoints, of the unit, of whole units;
- the violence and duration of the battle, as well as the prevalence of enemy forces;

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(1) Title of the pamphlet "Notes and documents concerning Italian prisoners and missing in Russia".

- the harsh climatic conditions;
- the lack of fuel that caused the abandonment of most of the artillery, vehicles and materials of the Major Units.

The fallen on the Don line, the dead fighters must be added during the retreat to break the enemy's encirclement and the rearward defense of Donez, the dead of hardship and toil and those who lost their lives in captivity.

General indications on the severity of the losses suffered by the Italian units are reported in the Soviet Official World War II Report (IVOVSS) where it is said that *"during the offensive on the Middle Don the units of the "South West" Fronts left wing of the "Voronez" Front, they inflicted a disastrous defeat at the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Italian and the left wing of the Army Group Don. Of the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army were destroyed five Infantry Divisions (3<sup>rd</sup> Celere, 5<sup>th</sup> Cosseria, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sforzesca, 9<sup>th</sup> Pasubio, 52<sup>nd</sup> Torino) and a Brigade of "Camicie Nere". This Army, which at the beginning of autumn 1942 had about 250,000 soldiers and officers, lost half of its members - dead, wounded and prisoners.*

*"The Italian troops were definitely defeated after having under enormous losses already in the Battle of Volga. The Alpine Corps and the southern wing of the Army Group B were almost completely eliminated.*

In the same IVOVSS, the Italian assertions that many thousands of men in the 8<sup>th</sup> Army were held prisoners in the USSR, whereas in reality, the Russians claim, they fell in combat *"and found their tomb in the steppes of the Don"*.

*"In fact," says writer Alexander Werth in his book "Russia in War, 1941 - 1945" (2) - there is another explanation for the failure of many Italians to return after the war and much talk about it in Moscow, towards the end of the conflict. Although manifests launched by planes to urge Italians to surrender with the promise to be sent "in a warm climate", indeed many thousands of Italian prisoners were destined to the camps of northern and central Russia, where they died of a large number of pneumonia, tuberculosis, etc.).*

*In the May 1972 issue of the Soviet Military Historic Magazine, it is said that "during the offensive launched*

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(2) ALEXANDER WERTH: op. cit., note 1, page 50.

*from the South-West Front and from the left of the Voronez Front in December 1942, Hitler's defenses were broken on a 340 kilometer front, causing serious losses to the enemy. The main forces of the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army, the German Battle Group Hollidt and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army were defeated, and three Divisions and three Italian Brigades were completely destroyed".*

The U.S.S.R. government has repeatedly stated that it has no more Italian prisoners in his hands, and after more than thirty-three years from those events, it does not seem unfounded to believe that the 74,800 men from the 8<sup>th</sup> Army who did not return to their homeland, they all died in the circumstances that were said.

Of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Forces who have not returned from the Russian front, they know the names of 69,042.

They are listed in the four volumes prepared by the General Commissariat for the War Memorial Honors of the Ministry of Defense, exhibited since 19 September 1971 in the Crypt of the National Temple of Cargnacco.

From these volumes the numerical data on the following pages are taken from the losses suffered by each operating unit, up to regiment level, and by the smaller units, for weapon and specialty.

#### NUMBERS OF LOSSES SUDDIVISES FOR ARM, SPECIALTY AND SERVICE

Carabinieri [Police]	473
Infantry:	
Line.	22,083
Grenadiers	88
Bersaglieri.	3,022
Alpine.	16,531
Cavalry.	492
Artillery of all the specialties	12,648
Engineers.	4,281
Chemical Units	415
Other units.	3,199
Services.	4,156
Camicie Nere [milita]	<u>1,654</u>
Total	69,042

NUMBER OF LOSSES OF ORGANIC UNITS,  
UNTIL THE REGIMENTAL LEVEL,  
AND MINOR UNITS, FOR ARM AND SPECIALITY

*Units Depending on the Commands of Major Unit:*

Line Infantry.	2,291
Grenadiers.	88
Alpine.	530
<i>Savoia Cavalleria</i>	182
<i>Lancieri di Novara.</i>	197
Various Cavalry.	113
Artillery	1,663
Chemical	415
Miscellaneous	97
9 <sup>th</sup> Army artillery regimental grouping	442
4 <sup>th</sup> A/A artillery regiment	184
3 <sup>rd</sup> horse artillery regiment.	470
201 <sup>st</sup> <i>Celere</i> artillery regiment.	251
2 <sup>nd</sup> Corps artillery regiment	400
11 <sup>th</sup> Corps artillery regiment	834
30 <sup>th</sup> Corps artillery regiment	480
Camicie Nere.	1,654

*Infantry Divisions:*

*Sforzesca (2<sup>nd</sup>):*

53 <sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment <i>Umbria</i>	2,162
54 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment <i>Umbria</i>	2,476
II Mortar battalion	164
17 <sup>th</sup> artillery regiment.	328

*Ravenna (3<sup>rd</sup>):*

37 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment <i>Ravenna.</i>	1,249
38 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment <i>Ravenna.</i>	811
III Mortar battalion	119
121 <sup>st</sup> artillery Regiment.	216

*Cosseria (5<sup>th</sup>):*

89 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment <i>Salerno</i>	417
90 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment <i>Salerno</i>	806
CV Mortar Battalion	83
108 <sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment.	67

<i>Pasubio (9<sup>th</sup>):</i>	
79 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment <i>Roma</i> .	1,778
80 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment <i>Roma</i> .	1,755
V and IX Mortar Battalions	309
8 <sup>th</sup> artillery regiment. .	601
<i>Torino (52<sup>nd</sup>):</i>	
81 <sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment <i>Torino</i>	2,006
82 <sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment <i>Torino</i>	1,800
XXVI and LII Mortar Battalions.	356
52 <sup>nd</sup> artillery regiment. .	792
<i>Vicenza (156<sup>th</sup>):</i>	
277 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment <i>Vicenza</i> .	1,722
278 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. <i>Vicenza</i>	1,663
<i>Celere Division (3<sup>rd</sup>):</i>	
3 <sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment.	2,053
6 <sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment.	969
IC Mortar Battalion	116
120 <sup>th</sup> artillery regiment.	457
<i>Alpine Divisions:</i>	
<i>Tridentina (2<sup>nd</sup>):</i>	
5 <sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment	2,253
6 <sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment	1,646
2 <sup>nd</sup> Alpine Artillery Regiment.	1,024
<i>Julia (3<sup>rd</sup>):</i>	
8 <sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment	2,577
9 <sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment	2,442
3 <sup>rd</sup> Alpine Artillery Regiment.	2,261
<i>Cuneense (4<sup>th</sup>):</i>	
1 <sup>st</sup> Alpine Regiment	3,305
2 <sup>nd</sup> Alpine Regiment	3,778
4 <sup>th</sup> Alpine Artillery Regiment.	2,178
<i>Carabinieri</i>	473
<i>Unregulated or autonomous Units:</i>	
Engineers	4,281
Various or unspecified	3,102
<i>Services.</i>	<u>4,156</u>
Total	69,042

## CHAPTER XX

### AWARDS FOR MILITARY VALOR GRANTED TO COMBAT UNITS AT THE RUSSIAN FRONT FROM AUGUST 1941 TO FEBRUARY 1943

To the Battle Flags of the CSIR and the 8<sup>th</sup> Army of the Russian Front from August 1941 to February 1943 were awarded the military rewards listed on the following pages.

Since these are rewards given to regiments, groupings and battalions, and are therefore collective in character, they symbolize all the fighters who have taken part in honor of the Russian campaign.

#### INFANTRY ARM.

37<sup>th</sup> Regiment *Ravenna* (*Ravenna* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Don - Donez, August 1942 - January 1943).

38<sup>th</sup> Regiment *Ravenna* (*Ravenna* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Don - Donez, August 1942 - January 1943).

53<sup>rd</sup> Regiment *Umbria* (*Sforzesca* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Ob. Tcirskey - Popovka - Annenskij - Krasnojarsk, 18 - 31 December 1942);

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Right Bank of Don - Jagodnyi, 17 - August 31, 1942).

54<sup>th</sup> Regiment *Umbria* (*Sforzesca* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Don - Donez, August 1942); Bronze Medal for Military Valor (Riva del Don - Tcebotarevskij - hill. 228 - hill 267.7, August 17-31, 1942).



79<sup>th</sup> Regiment *Roma* (*Pasubio* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Front of the Don: (Tereskovo- Krasnogorovka- Ogalev) - Getreide Svch - Scepilov - Sesepos - Kievskoye - Belaja Kalitva - Arbusov - Tcherkovo, 1 December 1942 - January 15, 1943);  
Silver Medal for Military Valor (Zaritscianka - Petrikovka - Gorlovka - Nikitovka - Chazepetovka - Bulavinksa - Vjolevka, August 1941 - May 1942);  
Silver Medal for Military Valor (Donez - Don, July 12 - August 31, 1942).

80<sup>th</sup> Regiment *Roma* (*Pasubio* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Jasnaja Poljana - Vionovka - Scelesnoje - Gorlovka - Nikitovka - Chazepetovka - Ploskij, August 1941 - May 1942);  
Gold Medal for Military Valor (Abrossimova - Monastirscina - Getreide Svch - Arbusov - Tcerkovo, 1 December 1942 - January 15, 1943)

81<sup>st</sup> Regiment *Torino* (*Torino* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Malo Orlovka - Novo Orlovka - Boguciar - Monastirscina - Passeka - Merkulov - Arbusov - Tcerkovo, July 1942 - January 1943);  
Silver Medal for Military Valor (Stakie - Kojadaki - Kamenka - Gorianovskije - Petrikovka - Mogila Pavlovskaja - Sofjevka - Rykovo - Chazepetovka - Bulavin Station - Malo Orlovka - Novaja Orlovka, August 1941 - May 1942).

82<sup>nd</sup> Regiment *Torino* (*Torino* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Junyi Kommunar - Demidov - Surrov - Arbusov - Tcherkovo, July 1942 - January 1943);  
Silver Medal for Military Valor (Obuchovkije - Kurilovka - Kresovska - Ubescicce - Rykovo - Chazepetovka - Jelenovka - Junyi Kommunar - Bosckovka, August 1941 - May 1942).

89<sup>th</sup> Regiment *Salerno* (*Cosseria* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Don, December 12-17, 1942); Cross of War for Military Valor (hill 158 - Don, September 11-12, 1942).

90<sup>th</sup> Regiment *Salerno* (*Cosseria* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, December 1942); Bronze Medal for Military Valor (hill 158.0 - Deresovka, September 11-12, 1942).

277<sup>th</sup> Regiment *Vicenza* (*Vicenza* Division):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Gnjana Balka - Donez, November 23, 1942; Kuscin - Semejki - Don, December 15, 1942 - January 17, 1943; Kalitva, January 23, 1943).

278<sup>th</sup> Regiment *Vicenza* (*Vicenza* Division):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Sector of Don - Kalitva River, January 1943).

3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment (3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Nipro - Ulianovka - Maximilianovka - Sofjevka - Stalino - Panteleimonovka - Rassipnaja - Michailovka - Jvanovka - Stoshkovo, August 1941 - May 1942);

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Rassipnaja - Fatschevka Station - Ivanovka - Serafimovic - Bobrovski - hill 224.4 - Jagodnyi, July 11 – 1 September 1942).

6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment (3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Orlovo Ivanovka - Bokovo Anthrazit - Bobrovski - Baskovski - hill 224.4 - Jagodnyi – hill 208.4, February - September 1942);

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Don River - Dnieper River, December 17, 1942 - February 20, 1943).

1<sup>st</sup> Alpine Regiment (*Cuneense* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, September 20, 1942 - January 28, 1943).

2<sup>nd</sup> Alpine Regiment (*Cuneense* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, September 20, 1942 - January 28, 1943).

4<sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment for the *Monte Cervino* Battalion (8<sup>th</sup> Army Command):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Olkovatka - hill 176 - Klinoviy - Brodi - Jagodnyi - Ivanovka - hyill 204 - Kolkos - Selenj Jar - Rossosc - Olkovatka, February 1942 - February, 1943).

5<sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment (*Tridentina* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Bassovka - Scororjb - Sceliakino - Nikitovka - Nikolaievka, August 1942 - February 1943)

6<sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment (*Tridentina* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Postojalyj - Sceliakino - Malakeieva - Arnautovo - Nikolaievka, August 1942 - February 1943);  
Bronze Medal for Military Valor (for the *Vestone* Alpine Battalion) (hill 195.8 - hill 209.6 - hill 236.7 - Don River, 1 September 1942).

8<sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment (*Julia* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, September 15, 1942 - February 1943)

9<sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment (*Julia* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, September 15, 1942 - February 1, 1943)

THE CAVALRY ARM.

*Savoia Cavalleria* Regiment:

(Cavalry Regimental Group) Gold Medal for Military Valor (Krasnyi - Luch Mining Basin, July 1942, Simovskij – hill 200.1 - hill 236.7 - hill 209.9 of Val Krisaia - Cibelion of Isbuscenski - Bachmutkin - hill 226.7 of Jagodnyi, August 21-30, 1942);  
(3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division) Bronze Medal for Military Valor (Nipro - Stalino - Krivojtorez - Panteleimonovka - Gorlovka, August 1941 - May 1942).

*Lancieri di Novara* Regiment (Cavalry Regimental Group):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Krasnyj - Luch Mining Basin, July 1942, hill 137.1 - hill 187.1 – hill 200.1 of Cebotarevski - Jagodnyi - Deviatkin - Bolschoi, August 21 - 30, 1942).  
(3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division) Silver Medal for Military Valor (Nipro - Uspenowka - Roiaw - Dejewka - Krivojtorez - Gorlowka - Samara, August 1941 - May 1942).

*San Giorgio* L Tank Group (3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division):

Bronze Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, August 1941 - May 1942).

## THE ARTILLERY ARM

### 8<sup>th</sup> Divisional Artillery Regiment (*Pasubio* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Tereskovo - Krasnohorovka - Ogalev - Abrossimova - Monastirscina - Getreide Svch - Zehepilov - Leskos - Kievskoye - Belaja Kalitva - Arbusov - Tcerkovo, 1 December 1942 - January 15, 1943);

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Jsnaia - Poljaslazari - Tciakavoinovka - Petrikovka - Gorlovka - Nikitovka - Chazepetovka - Ploskoj, August 1941 - May 1942).

### 17<sup>th</sup> Divisional Artillery Regiment (*Sforzesca* Division):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Jagodnyi - Cebotarevski, August 17 - 31, 1942);

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, December 18 - 31, 1942) '

### 52<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Artillery Regiment (*Torino* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Malo and Novo Orlovka - Boguciar - Diatcenkova - Monastirscina - Passeka - Merkulov - Demidov - Surov - Arbusov - Tcerkov, July 1942 - January 1943);

Bronze Medal for Military Valor (Starije - Koidaki - Obuskovskije - Gorianovskie - Sofjevka - Rykovo - Ubescicce - Chazepetovka - Jelenovka - Bulavin Station - Junyj Kommunar - Boskovka - Malo Orlovka - Novaja Orlovka, August 1941 - May 1942).

### 108<sup>th</sup> Divisional Artillery Regiment (*Cosseria* Division):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Novo Kalitva - Kosharnij - Samodurovka - Deresovka, 11 – 18 December 1942);

Cross of War for Military Valor (hill 158 - Deresovka, 11 – 12 September 1942).

### 120<sup>th</sup> Division Artillery Regiment (3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (hill 331.7 - Nikitino - Fatscevk Station - Ivanovka - Schterovka - Bokovo Antrazit - Battles of the Don of Serafimovic and Jagodnyi, March - October 1942).

121<sup>st</sup> Divisional Artillery Regiment (*Ravenna* Division):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Don River - Denez River, August 1942 - January 1943)

2<sup>nd</sup> Alpine Artillery Regiment (*Tridentina* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Med Don, August 1942 - February 1943)

3<sup>rd</sup> Alpine Artillery Regiment (*Julia* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, September 15, 1942 - February 1, 1943)

4<sup>th</sup> Alpine Artillery Regiment (*Cuneense* Division):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, September 20, 1942 - January 27, 1943)

2<sup>nd</sup> Army Corps Regimental Artillery Group (II Army Corp):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Hill of Argentera, 10 – 25 June 1940; Tobruk, January 1941; Bend of the Don - hill 220, 21 - 25 August 1942; Krasno Orekovo - Sviniuka, 10 - 12 September 1942; Don, 11 – 19 December 1942; Golubaja Kriniza - Selenj, 19 December 1942 - 17 January 1943)

11<sup>th</sup> Army Corps Regimental Artillery Group (Alpine Army Corps):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Novo Orlovka - Belogorje - Novo Kalitva - Opyt - Vschijova - Nikitova - Nikolaievka, July 1942 - February 1943)

30<sup>th</sup> Army Corps Regimental Artillery Group (XXXV Army Corps - CSIR):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, December 1942 - February 1943);

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, July-September 1942);

Cross of War for Military Valor (Russian Front, August 1941 - May 1942)

9<sup>th</sup> Army Regimental Artillery Group (8<sup>th</sup> Army):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Bend of Verhnij Mamon - Gadjutcie - Boguciar - Tcherkovo - Krasnohorovka - Monastirscina)

Bogomolof - Konovalof - Frolovskij - Novo Kriskoj - Verch. Singin - Jagodnyi - Novo Astachof - Kaschary, August 1942 - January 18, 1943).

4<sup>th</sup> anti-aircraft Regimental Grouping (8<sup>th</sup> Army):

Bronze Medal for Military Valor (Rossosc - Gadjutcie - Kantemirovka - Mankovo Kalitvenskaja - Tcherkovo - Maltcevsckaja - Millerovo - Voroscilovgrad, July 1942 - January 1943).

201<sup>st</sup> Army Artillery Regiment (8<sup>th</sup> Army):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Utkino - Scevtcenko - Serahmovic - Jagodnyi - Cebotarev - Blinof - Samodurovka - Deresovka - Krasnohorovka - Belogorskoye, July 1942 - January 1, 1943).

Horse artillery regiment:

(3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Division) Silver Medal for Military Valor (Nipro - Uspetovka - Rykovo - Gorlovka - Chazepetovka - Michailovka - Ivanovka, August 1941 - May 1942);  
(Cavalry group) Silver Medal for Military Valor (Nikitino - Sceterovskj, July 1942; Tonin - Simovskj - Isbuscenski - Cebotarevski - Devjatkin - Bolschoi, August 20-30, 1942);  
(Cavalry group) Silver Medal for Military Valor (Middle Don - Sceljakino - Tciuprinin, November 1942 - January 1943).

#### ENGINEERS ARM.

4<sup>th</sup> Artisans regiment (for mixed battalion, *Tridentina* Division):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Opyt - Nikolaievka, August 1942 - February 1943).

9<sup>th</sup> Artisans regiment (for XXVI battalions - XXXV Army Corps - CSIR):

Bronze Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, November 1942 - January 1943).

1<sup>st</sup> Bridging Regiment (for IX Bridging Battalion - XXXV Army Corps - CSIR):

Silver Medal at for Military Valor (Dniepropetrovsk - Slavjanka, August 1941 - May 1942).

2<sup>nd</sup> Bridging Regiment:

(for the I Bridging Battalion - XXXV Army Corps - CSIR)

Bronze Medal for Military Valor (Dniepropetrovsk - Slavjanka, August 1941 - May 1942);

(for 22<sup>nd</sup> Bridging company – 8<sup>th</sup> Army) Bronze Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, December 17-19, 1942).

Railway Regiment (for X Railway Battalion - 8<sup>th</sup> Army):

Cross of War for Military Valor (Krasnohorovka area, December 1942).

10<sup>th</sup> Regiment (for XL workers group – 8<sup>th</sup> Army):

Cross of War for Military Valor (Russian Front, December 1942 - January 1943)

11<sup>th</sup> Regiment (for mixed battalion, *Julia* Division):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (Russian Front, September 15, 1942 - February 1, 1943).

## SERVICES.

Army Military Health (1):

Gold Medal for Military Valor (North and East Africa - Albania - Russian Front - Liberation War, June 1940 - May 9, 1945)

Automotive Corps (1):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (North and East Africa - Albania - Russian Front - Liberation War, 10 June 1940 - May 9, 1945)

Military Commissariat Corps (1):

Silver Medal for Military Valor (10 June 1940 - May 9, 1945)

Military Administration Corps (1):

Bronze Medal for Military Valor (10 June 1940 - 9 May 1945)

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(1) To the Flag of the Corps with comprehensive motivation throughout the war and all fronts.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS





The presence of the Italian Grande Units at the Russian front was not motivated, according to the government of the time, only by the ideological contrast between the political forces in power in the Soviet Union and that in power in Italy, but mainly for other valid reasons.

It was considered that the traditional Russian push to the straits that set the Black Sea in communication with the Mediterranean was of great importance for Italy, enclosed in an inland sea whose outlets were owned by Great Britain, who Italy was in war.

In addition, the constant interest of ancient and contemporary Russia in the Balkan region created new grounds for competition between Moscow and Rome, which then sought to obtain greater security in the Balkan countries for its north - eastern border and throughout the long extension of the Adriatic coast. Moreover, the interest of Italy at that time for Balkan issues was increased after the union with Albania. Italy had had the problems of that nation, problems that were often conflicting with those of neighboring countries.

Italy's oil supply, especially during the war that isolated it from other sources, was largely dependent on Romania's oil wells and the Soviet pressure on that country was a danger.

The course of the war in the Mediterranean, particularly on the African front, had determined the intervention of German units alongside the Italian ones and was already considered to be of great importance the aid of the first German units that came to the front at Sirte and immediately opposed to the British forces attest at the thresholds of Tripolitania,

It is likely that by Mussolini, accepting the Germanic view of a swift and victorious conclusion of the war in Russian territory, it was favorably considered the possibility

to bring Italian forces to a success of such importance. In fact, on June 2, 1942, to General Messe who had come to Rome to try and prevent the sending of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army to Russia, Mussolini replied: "Dear Messe, at the peace table will weigh more heavily the 200,000 of the Army than the 60 thousands of CSIR".

Lastly, it was known that the strategic plan of the Germans was configured as a great pincer intended to close upon the Middle East, so as to let go of broad economic horizons for the existence of well-known oil fields. The southwest branch of the tentacle was represented by the Libyan territory subject to Italy and the Italian - German forces operating there. In Rome, therefore, it was considered appropriate that in the German branch of the tentacle operating in the northeast there were also Italian units, likewise interested in achieving the economic horizons mentioned above.

When Germany attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, Italy was already in the war for more than a year and had come in despite the serious state of the Army's unpreparedness. In fact, in concluding the alliance with Germany in 1939, the Italian Government had very much insisted on the Germans to avoid any conflict before three years, ie before 1943, so that Italy had at least the time to suitably prepare its Armed Forces.

Unpreparedness invested the very foundations on which the efficiency of an Army was based and had deep roots that extended to the whole period between the first and second world conflicts. For more than twenty years, instead of reconsolidating and advancing in its efficiency, the Army had to record increasingly serious deficiencies, even because it was engaged in an uninterrupted series of African and Mediterranean operations, as a result of which it was never able to recover fully.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Army was in full crisis of organization: the new order had not yet been reached; the previous one was invalidated as a result of the new tactical doctrine that was based on the most recent organic instrument (the Binary Division), as for partial modifications initially already occurred, or still in progress, in the units; armament was generally outdated, its modernization being still being studied or planned.

Major deficiencies were tanks, mortars, vehicles, anti-tank and anti-aircrafts artilleries, ammunition

of all artillery and mortars. Medium and large caliber artillery were also to be entirely renovated.

The armament situation was well-known to the highest political authorities that had been repeatedly represented in all its gravity, and the Foreign Minister himself had called it "disastrous" in his Diary.

If that was the situation in 1940, it was inevitably worsened in the following two years, when the CSIR and the 8<sup>th</sup> Army units were made, as considerable forces in men, weapons and vehicles had already been engaged on the various fronts, and that could not but affect the efficiency of divisions destined for the eastern front.

Thus, as was the case in the other operational theaters, even in the Russian one, the Italian units were called to carry out tasks whose scope was inversely proportional to their poor material, organic and operational possibilities.

The presence of Italy in the USSR, irrespective of whether the Army was still in a position to pursue a multi-faceted war, was, among other things, in contrast to the ancient principle of non-division of forces. It would, in fact, recommend a more firm commitment to North Africa than to intervene in Russia, where dozens of Armies with millions of men were opposed in an immense space, while the CSIR units and the 8<sup>th</sup> Army in their limited power and numerical entities, could not give, as they did not, make any decisive contribution to the overall performance of operations.

It is to be assumed, however, that if the ten divisions of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, with 16,000 vehicles and 1,000 cannons, had been deployed, for example in September 1942, in North Africa - when the Italian-German units had come to El Alamein, just over a hundred miles from Alexandria - they could have given a different trend to the operations of the south - west branch of the strategic pincer. The Nations of the "Axis" would also have lost the war, faced as they were from the most Great Powers of the World, but Italy could not possibly have left in the African desert the eighty thousand men who did not return from the Russian front and the units that fought there would not have been subjected to great hardships and useless sacrifices for over seventeen months.

The sending of Italian forces to the Russian front therefore opposed important reasons of unquestionable validity. From the archive documentation, however, it does not appear that the competent military authority

has ever expressed to the political power an opinion contrary to the presence of a Expeditionary Corps in that theater of war and its presence then ended up finding unusual and absurd motivation in the sentence quoted by the Head of Government: "*We can not be outdone by Slovakia*".

There may still be some other considerations on the activities of CSIR and the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, in addition to those that have been expressed so far in parallel with the narrative of operational events.

A common factor for the two Grande Units is the isolation in which they operated, due to the distance from the national territory that the combat units deprived of the direct support of the country; to act within the framework of a coalition war, relying on bases spread in areas where norms dictated by other Powers applied; to the discontinuity of communication with the motherland and the same extent as the exalted front, where the German army was committed to solving the enormous problems posed by the activities of its Army Groups and subordinately those considered less important than the allied units. But above all, the fundamental cause of isolation was still in the character of the two peoples, the Italian one and the German one, and in the traditions of the two Armies themselves, so different from each other that not always favoring the cordiality that must inform the relations between men and fighting units side by side on the same front.

As far as CSIR's activity is concerned, it has been said that it had to operate for a long time in one of the most modern German armored units, without having armored units and a fleet of vehicles that allowed the carriage of only one of its three Divisions (not even complete).

To keep up with the powerful allied forces in the offensive phase to the east, the Italian units supported a series of particularly harsh physical deprivations and hardships, in addition to the wear and tear of the fighting and the losses suffered in the advance.

Exceptional moral strength, CSIR men marched in dust and mud for hundreds of miles, have supported dozens of battles with tenacious impetus and have faced stoically all the inconveniences, hardships and difficulties of all sorts without manifestations of insanity or indiscretion. Chapter XVII is particularly significant in this regard.

From the point of view of the operational commitment, momentum and courage in combat and, essentially, military value, the CSIR campaign can rightly be among the most affiliated stories of Italian military history.

A way of life on the front and a fight of all respect, not to be attributed to the ideological significance that could take on the Italian presence alongside the Germans, but rather to the *military spirit* that animates the Armed Forces of each country when they come to the field by mandate of the Nation, and consider their duty, in oath, to fight with skill, courage, and tenacity to force the nation itself, through its constitutional organs, as an enemy and foe of the Homeland.

One of the first authors of the CSIR's moral and compact combat effectiveness was their Commander, General Giovanni Messe, a wise and determined Head that the proven combative experience had a profound knowledge of the soldier's soul, in which he knew how to identify and who had the utmost respect, not only formal but also in the constant aim of limiting as far as possible sacrifices and protecting the honor of the fighter.

For General Messe's constant concern to reduce discomforts and sacrifices to the units under his command include, among other things, the example of the inflexible determination to oppose the order of the German Command to move eastward the Italian units that came to Donetsk's Basin, because in this area better wintering conditions could be achieved (a solution to which the same German Commands had to arrive for their units).

The Commander of CSIR was in no position less concerned with the defense of his military units. During the first defensive battle of Don, the partial and limited success achieved by the Soviets on the front of the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR was wrongly attributed by the Germans to the little resistance given by the *Sforzesca* Division, rather than to the disproportionate vastness of the defensive sectors assigned to Italian forces. When, as a consequence of such an erroneous assessment, Army Group "B" Command (August 26, 1942) removed from the natural Command of the XXXV Army Corps - CSIR all the Italian units deployed in the *Sforzesca* sector to transfer them to the dependencies of the adjacent German XVII Army Corps, General Messe summoned the German liaison officer (Major G.S. Fellmer), to ask him to work

in order to revoke the inappropriate and unfair disposition. And to show in the most eloquent manner possible anger and protest, the Knight of the Order of the Cross of Iron lifted from his neck shortly before, saying to the unrepentant interlocutor that he would only re-open when the disputed order had been revoked.

The work of General Messe was validly and diligently flanked by the tireless activity of his Chief of Staff, Colonel Umberto Utili and the units of the Corps of Shipment always had in the "Command CSIR" an illuminated and coherent guide of undisguised moral and professional prestige, followed by everyone with serene confidence even in the most difficult times (1).

The judgment on CSIR's work over thirty years from the facts can only be positive, especially if we consider the poor structure of its units and the conditions under which they had to act.

The life and operational activity of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was less fortunate and more complex than that of CSIR, also because the force was more than tripled and the tasks to be performed were not commensurate with the organic possibilities.

The evaluation of the results achieved by the Grande Unit in seven months of operations must necessarily include, before any other examination, the efficiency of the instrument that those results would have to achieve

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(1) General Messe, promoted by war merit to General of the Army on his return from the Russian front, was destined for the Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army operating in Tunisia. The valiant conduct of the units at his orders received the recognition of the enemy, which gave the unfortunate Italian fighters the honor of the weapons at the time of surrender. The work of the Commander of the Army was rewarded with his promotion to Marshal of Italy. As soon as the armistice regime was implemented, the Italian government obtained its liberation from the imprisonment of war, in order to entrust him in November 1943 with the position of Head of the G.S. General which he held until the end of the war.

Colonel Utili, who was promoted to Brigade General, since January 1944 commanded *The Motorized Grouping*, the first unit of the Army called to work against the Germans after the events of the armistice of September 1943. Subsequently he formed and commanded the Italian Liberation Corps with it, from April to the end of August 1944, climb the peninsula fighting against the Germans from Lanciano to Urbino. He then took over the Command of the "*Legnano*" *Combat Group* which he held until the end of the war. General of the Division for War Merit, then was promoted to General of Corps in 1949.

As was the case with the CSIR, even the Army did not, in practice, have armored vehicles to carry off offensive actions or even to counteract the enemy actions; the anti-tank weapon, which was numerically sufficient, but not all of them qualitatively, to oppose the formation of the Soviet infantry, was completely inadequate to counteract the waves of armored brigades of the enemy. The anti-tank action was thus relegated by the infantry to the arrest by the artillery. After this, in the absence of substantial Italian formations, the struggle could only be followed by an intervention, which was always late and inadequate, by the German armored divisions.

Moreover, as has already been said, the vastness of the areas assigned to the Army placed the Italian units under the conditions of constituting only a weak defensive chain that was easy to break, totally devoid of units to be flown where the attack was looming, not so much to counter it with counter-offensive actions, as to prolong the duration of the defense and allow the inflow of German strategic reserves.

In particular, as far as Don's first defensive battle is concerned, it can be argued that the 8<sup>th</sup> Army could substantially fulfill the task received, not only by retaining its own riverside, or modestly retreating it into a section of the line, but above all by guaranteeing from the north the safety of the rear by the German 6<sup>th</sup> Army, which operated from Don in the direction of Volga at Stalingrad. The retreat of the extreme right wing of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army in the XXXV Corps - CSIR was rendered inevitable both from the immediate prevalence of the violent attack on the *Sforzesca* Division and from the small commitment of the contiguous German XVII Corps not only in securing the junction between the two armies the 6<sup>th</sup> German and the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian at a time in which the Soviet armies were in the defensive phase, but even when they had passed the counter-offensive.

In fact, during this battle often Italian units



and anticipated, the assistance of German armored vehicles had taken place, to complete the daring action conducted by the Alpine on September 1<sup>st</sup> and that the alliance's failure to intervene made void.

In the second defensive battle of Don, however, when the 8<sup>th</sup> Army was deprived of every unit of maneuver and all was deployed on the Don, the resistance was abandoned in place of the units directly assailed by the preliminary actions of attrition lasting five days, Soviet offensive on 16 December could only fully achieve the strategic successes obtained at the end of November on the Romanian Armed Forces by isolating German forces in Stalingrad.

The absence of large Armored Units, the minute fractionation on the ground of infantry and artillery, the slow turnout of inadequate German reinforcements, did not allow to stifle the impetus of the Soviet 6<sup>th</sup> Army and the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Army.

The continuation of Russia's great offensive in January with Operation "Ostrovosk-Rossosc" against German and Hungarian forces renewed the success achieved in December with Operation "Little Saturn" because Germans could not remove the main cause that had determined it, namely the scarcity of forces in relation to the tasks to be performed.

The command action exercised by the Commander of the Army certainly had very narrow limits.

Not only did the German Commissions reject the objections of General Gariboldi of the disproportion between available forces and tasks to be performed, but often the Army Group Command intervened directly to give orders to the German and even Italian Army Corps, going over the head of the Army Command. General Gariboldi's grievances with regard to the German High Command were always inspired by the most rigorous military correctness, but even if they had been expressed in a more vibrated way to prevent the inappropriate interventions being renewed, the German command had probably could not have changed the course of conduct.

Generali Gariboldi's action of command, in essence, was confined by the Army Group "B" Command and, on the other, by the Italian Supreme Command, who in that case expressed the phrase "*Let the Command Do*", where the Command par excellence was the German one.

The conduct of the fighters in all the actions of the Army has always been, with the exception of the Kantemirovka episode, conforming to the traditions of the Army, namely correct, honorable and in line with the principles of military duty. The moral strength of the men of the Army emerged in particular in Don's second defensive battle, when everyone knew how to fight an unprecedented and hopelessly struggle equally with firm tenacity.

On the moral of the fighters, besides what has been said (chapter XV), it is good to add an authoritative testimony, that of the Chief Chaplain of the Army, Don Arrigo Pintonello (2). He writes, among other things, the priest in a 1943 report:

*"The wild nature of the country, the distance from the homeland, the often lacking of mail, living in a doubly foreign land, are just as many factors that could sometimes adversely affect the soul of our soldier; nevertheless so deeply as to blemish the morale and undermine its spirit. Even on the most tragic days, our soldier in the land of Russia has always kept his natural good humor, serenity, trust of the strong.*

*"This has been easy to see in the continuing peregrinations of a leader in the field assigned to our troops; this I have always observed in the reports sent by the Chaplain Corp.*

*"He was, in all, even in the humble soldier, the feeling that nothing was left out of our higher commands to ensure the fighter supplies, equipment, delivery of mail, etc., while the sending of garments and gifts from homeland deeply touched him.*

*"However, it can not be denied that there were other factors together that could affect the morale of the troops. And first, I refer to the lack, in the majority of soldiers, of a clear conscience about the necessity of Russia's campaign: they concerned the anti-Bolshevik war rather as the ally's war, rather than its own. The general persuasion then that our soldier was, in terms of armament, in inferiority with respect to the enemy, influenced indifferently his spirit. It has often happened to me to feel responses from the soldiers, in anticipation of the Russian general attack, that they would have resisted until the last, but that against the Russian tanks and their parabellum would not have been able to do anything. The fear was widespread*

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(2) Nominated in 1953 as Military Ordinary (Bishop) for Italy.

*that, in an eventual offensive, the proper means to counteract would be lacking.*

*"It must not be said that intense German propaganda represented the captive in the soldier's mind of the prisoner as the equivalent of death itself: hence the nightmare, the terror of becoming prisoners of the enemy. Far from igniting the spirit of combativeness in the soldier, he troubled him and made him extremely restless".*

Confirmation of the commitment by which the units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army resisted the mighty Soviet 6<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Armies under the "Little Saturn Operation" is now published in the recent "Soviet Official History of World War II" (3).

From the pages of this report, reproduced below, clearly emerges that it does not question the recognition of the Soviets of tenacity with which the Italian units resisted. And it is significant that in the Russian narrative of the entire counter-cyclical cycle that runs from November 19, 1942 to early February 1943, expressions such as "fierce resistance, obstinate" (*ozestoénnoe, upornoe soprotivlenie*) often occur only in reference to the actions of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

So the Russians wrote in their publication that the difficulties encountered by the troops in preparing the mid-December attack against the positions held by the "Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army" did not have negative reflections on the combat spirit of the soldiers.

Before the "Little Saturn's Operation" began, an intense and widespread moral action was carried out to encourage the units involved in the operation; the soldiers were told that the outcome of the new phase of the offensive on the Stalingrad front was due to their actions, in many respects.

On the eve of the attack, each fighter was handed a newspaper with the text of the appeal of the military Soviets of the affected Fronts, with whom men were exhorted to move forward, as in Moscow, Rostov and Tihvin battles to free the cities, villages, and families from the enemy.

The appeal was also read in the units: one after the other spoke the exhortation of soldiers, political commanders and instructors who swore to faithfully execute the orders of the country and to increase with a new victory "*the prestige of Soviet arms*".

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(3) MINISTRY OF THE DEFENSE OF THE USSR: "History of World War II, 1939 - 1945", vol. VI (published in Moscow in 1976), p. 65, 66, 68 and 69.

During the fighting, efforts to keep the morale of the fighters always high and their offensive power, *"despite the fierce resistance of the enemy,"* were particularly concentrated in companies and batteries.

The publication of the Ministry of Defense of the USSR continues, literally, as follows:

*"On the morning of December 16, after artillery preparation, the attack units of the Southwest and Voronez Fronts went to action. Due to dense fog, the effectiveness of artillery fire was low and the planes could not fly. Consequently, enemy defense was not sufficiently neutralized. All this caused the attacking troops to soon meet the organized resistance of the enemy.*

*"The progression of the attack developed slowly. The Grande Rifle Units of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army and 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Army succeeded after the first half day, to advance only 2 to 3 km. In this situation, the Commanders of the Fronts decided to commit the Armored Corps into battle to achieve the breakthrough of the enemy defensive tactical zone. However, in an attempt to attack the enemy, their advanced units faded in the mined fields and, having suffered losses, were forced to desist from the attack. The opening of the lanes in the mined fields delayed the entry into the battle of the armored units until the morning of the following day.*

*"In the second half of December 16, the weather improved somewhat. The artillery and the aviation of the Fronts intensified support for the attacking troops. Assault and bombardment planes attacked defensive deployments, resistance centers, command posts, and enemy observation. On the sky of the battlefield, the air combat flared.*

*"However, the units of the attacking formations were still unable to break the enemy defensive tactical zone. The enemy maneuvered, strengthened, and actively employed his aviation.*

*"In similar conditions, the fighting also developed in the sector of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guards Army of General D. D. Leljusenko, whose Grande Rifle Units met with firm resistance of the enemy and could not fulfill the task they entrusted for that day.*

*"In the morning of 17 December, after artillery preparation and aviation intervention, the Grande Unit of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army and the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Army renewed the attack.*

*"In close co-operation with them the Armored Corps attacked, who entered the battle in succession: at the beginning, the XXV and XVIII Armored Corps entered, then the XVII and XXIV. The advance of the Armored Grande Units was deeply supported by a massive fire of artillery and even by aviation, which was very active.*

*"After the overwhelming resistance of the enemy and rejecting his fierce counterattack, the units of the 6th and the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Army infringed, at the end of the second day, the tactical defensive zone and advanced for 20 to 25 km.*

*"The enemy opposed a particularly obstinate resistance on December 18, on the Army defensive line whose failure opened to Soviet units the way to the rear of the main forces of the Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army.*

*"The Italian Grande Units, and the German ones with them, began to fall back south and southeast.*

Relations with the Germans have already hinted in the previous chapters. There were moments of crisis in that field, not so much in the CSIR operating cycle, where the disadvantages described had also occurred, as during the operations of the Army and in particular in the preparation and conduct of the second defensive battle of the Don .

The Italian units were not in perfect operational efficiency due to the precarious structural conditions determined, among other things, by inadequate armament and the unavailability of armored and motorized units. They therefore expected considerable help from the Germans to restore, at least in part, their deficiencies.

Such help, along with a more cordial relationship, would have made the Italians' commitment to the battlefield less heavy. They, however, did not receive any assistance and were entrusted with operational tasks that were far beyond the capabilities of the Army, as they rejected all the proposals to improve the defensive organization of Don, repeatedly and patiently presented by Gen. Gariboldi.

In his report compiled in December 1946 (4), the Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army wrote, among other things, about relations with the Germans:

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(4) To integrate the monograph of the HISTORICAL OFFICE OF GENERAL STAFF GENERAL: "The 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army in the Second Defensive Battle of Don (11 December 1942 - January 31, 1943)", Tip. Regional, Rome, 1946.

*"When, however, the situation has become decidedly serious, the obvious, threatening and confronting enemy pressure adjacent to our breakthroughs, then the Germans began to believe in danger and seek remedies in late orders, and logical if prepared in time, as already proposed by us, with adequate means, materials, workmanship, which were instead denied or at best granted as a grace, but with the dropper. Then, and only then, in the imminence of the enemy attack for a long time pre-announced by our Command and always questioned by the Germans until the eve, then came to the Army Command pressing orders for the construction of robust rear area security lines allow for shortcomings in the front, to cushion any breakthrough. - It was made clear that there was no time, means, and workmanship. They answered the usual thing: "we will do it", but in practice they did nothing because they lacked the time and no means or hands were available.*

*"The Germans were surprised by the enemy and, worse, betrayed by their incalculable faith in the infallibility of their methods and the invincibility of their troops. This faith he wanted to keep at all cost made them blind in the face of reality and pushed to the irreparable.*

*"They are found in very serious situations, without reserve, without means, without supplies, between threats growing on each side and rampant in depth, towards the interior.*

*"Situation certainly exasperating, bitter awakening from cherished illusions, one must admit it, and this explains different things, different acts, different dispositions, but not everything. Not the tenacity of not seeing the danger, not to admit it was wrong, not wanting to decide painful but necessary measures because it was able to heal or at least improve the realistic situation that advocated gaining time and space; and above all, it does not explain, and much less justifies the wickedness, the injustice, the falsehood with which they have tried to save themselves and their prejudices and judge the behavior of the Italians; does not explain the anti-human cruelty with which the German Command and Troops have acted against us".*

The stubborn judgment of Gen. Gariboldi is perhaps pervaded by the bitterness of the Commander who saw his Grande Unit involved without blame in an irreparable defeat.

There is no doubt, however, that that judgment was shared by the great majority of the members of every rank of the Army, as is apparent from the massive memoirs postwar period and as is also documented by archive.

When he returned home, still living in the soul and in the flesh the moral and physical torment of the suffering experienced in a campaign of war which they had never understood of necessity - but who, however, had equally dealt with fidelity and honor in obedience to the mandate received from the country - the survivors became more and more convinced of being deceived by the national government, who had put them into an armed struggle because their sacrifices were "*weighed on the table of peace*," and the resentment for the conduct had been accentuated little friendly to them by the Germans. The Italian soldiers alongside them with good will to fight a war while not felt.

In the seventeen months of hard work, however, it had to be day by day noticed that there was no fraternity of the alliance or identity of feelings or respect for those who struggled and died on the same side.

But the men of CSIR and the 8<sup>th</sup> Army are equally oppressed-with the capriciousness now recognized by the same opponent of that time, -facing their loyalty to soldiers, in spite of everything, by sacrificing the life of one fighter out of three.

The useless campaign, however, at least contributed to reveal to Italian fighters the significance of their presence on that theater of operations.

Politically naive war parties, because they grew up in an era during which the fundamental freedoms in the country were not operating, the same war had given them a long maturity and made them aware of the true essence of fascism and Nazism.

With such feelings, the survivors reintegrated into national society and transgressed in them their right of rebellion towards the foreigner and towards the dictatorship.

## DOCUMENTS





Document n. 1.

TELEGRAM  
FROM THE MILITARY ATTACHÉ IN BUCHAREST  
TO THE MINISTRY OF WAR - CABINET – ROME

(21 April 1941 - 21 hours)

No. 897/363 *stop* - Romanian units and cavalry Army Corps are moving from Bucovina Moldavia replaced by German motorized and ordinary units flowing continuously *stop* Belief that German-Romanian action against U.S.S.R. it is not far to be reiterated *stop* This also because well-known German troops at the Hungarian - U.S.S.R. border arousing enthusiasm *stop* These military environments believe that if Germany decides to attack U.S.S. R., Romania will also have time to complete defensive as German motorized troops come to north and center Poland *stop*

German colleagues naturally maintain most absolute secrecy *stop*

*Valfré*

Document n. 2.

TELEGRAM  
THE MILITARY ATTACHÉ IN BERLIN  
TO THE MINISTRY OF WAR - CABINET – ROME

(May 7, 1941 – 18 hours)

240/S, 241/S and 242/S *stop* - I know that day 8 to 9 Führer will depart with a custom special train accompanied by his military advisers of the O.K.W. (Including Keitel) to Berghof *stop* Already there will be a dozen days to discuss military and political plans next campaign *stop* From conversations with generals and other officials who have ongoing contacts with Führer I believed that one of the next goals would be employment in Gibraltar and possibly Portugal *stop* for Gibraltar is thought to be able to fall in a few days *stop* I'll be sure to check if this operation is linked as I think at action on the opposite African shore *stop* There will also be a problem going through Turkey for eventual action towards Iraq and Egypt. *stop* This last problem related to eventuality against Russia that would be uncertain whether to start next summer to postpone the coming year *stop* Decisions would probably be made during the Berghof meeting

In the meantime, it has been considerably strengthened, in response it is said to increase Russian forces at the border with Germany, border coverage with Russia sending a significant part of the armored and motorized divisions that have completed the campaign against Yugoslavia and Greece *stop* However, plan against Russia already prepared and predicted a campaign lasting two months and a half *stop* Understanding Leningrad occupation, Moscow and all of Ukraine *stop* Operation against Russia would be implemented between July and September to occupy Ukraine immediately after grain harvesting and before it is distributed to other parts of Russia *stop*, Action would also tend to improve the German and European food situation to facilitate raw material inflow to shatter future allied democratic Anglo-American powers and permanently endanger Communist idea that at war ended, albeit victorious for Germany, would find it easy to import not just Reich but also Europe after a long-lasting war *stop* It should be noted that action against Russia's is Hitler's oldest dream developed from "Mein Kampf" who had only started with occupation Poland and then had to postpone him for unexpected Franco-English intervention.

On the basis of today's news from the officer of this senior staff, the possibilities and predispositions mentioned above are fully confirmed. In addition, It also was added: 1<sup>st</sup> - the transport of G.U. Germans are heading toward the west and particularly at the canal coast to resume the attack on England which is not yet firm but that would be implemented by experiencing a favorable situation. It is hoped that later almost daily attacks on British industrial centers would be likely to take place moral shake and greatly reduce domestic production *stop* Elimination England would be tempted as soon as it had the feeling that probability was successful for almost 90 per cent favorable in Germany *stop* It will do everything to happen in the current year before the United States intervenes make more German success uncertain *stop* Once firm invasion success will be attempted with all the means including as far as I understand suffocating gas *stop* In this regard, I noticed at O.K.W. new deployments and training with anti-gas masks by staff working in offices *stop* 2<sup>nd</sup> - has been considerably strengthened 7<sup>th</sup> German Army for long time deployed at the Franco-Spanish border 3<sup>rd</sup> - Is reinforced the deployment at the Eastern border with divisions of shock behind the pre-existing coverage *stop* 4<sup>th</sup> - Germany is able to simultaneously maintain offensive alignment against England and Russia and also have forces available for action on Gibraltar and Portugal and to reinforce it to maintain at number of armored vehicles given to Rommel *stop*

*Gen. E. L. Marras*

Document n. 3

REPORT FROM THE MILITARY ATTACHÉ IN BERLIN

Berlin, May 30, 1941

*Subject:* Germany's intentions regarding Russia.

*To the Ministry of War – Cabinet*

Rome

For a long time it is about the possibility of a German military action against Russia. And this voice is fueled in particular by the growing concentration of land and air forces towards the Soviet border. Other rumors have pointed out in the last weeks of ongoing or emerging negotiations that Berlin would take with Moscow, effectively supporting them; object of this array of forces.

Germany's essential objective would be to permanently eliminate any threat from the East and above all to ensure food supplies and raw materials. This goal should be achieved by placing one hand or another in the rich territory of Ukraine and probably also on the Caucasus oil basin, as well as by taking over Russian communications, whose reorganization is indispensable to ensuring the security of the Russian nation, inflow of supplies.

Russia's attitude towards Germany has proved to be quite misleading, despite all the declarations and indifference with which the Soviets have taken some recent blows. In essence, however, the attitude of the Soviets is hostile and this hostility manifested itself above all whenever Russia was able to formally treat the treaties and act against Germany by avoiding its immediate intervention. As a good source I was assured that Fuhrer is personally angry with Russia and that his feeling has become more pronounced after Molotoff's recent visit. To Russia, Germany essentially reproaches:

- the absorption of the Baltic provinces, which would not have been explicitly covered in the agreements of August 1939;
- the annexation of Bessarabia and, above all, the lack of supplies, particularly sensitive: in respect of cereals and certain raw materials.

It is evident that the prospect of a prolongation of the war beyond 1941 puts in the forefront of Germany the problem of supplies, starting with that of the groceries. The food situation in Europe is now underdeveloped and this deficiency is expected to be even more felt in the coming year. For this reason, it is essential for Germany and for the Axis to ensure the possession or control of certain areas of production in Russia.

The Fuhrer has been holding Berchtesgaden for about a month now, together with the General Staff. It is very likely that the decisions for the further development of operations are being finalized during this year. It's obvious on one side that the current year must be

used by Germany to make the most of its current superiority in order to determine a decision or at least create the most favorable conditions for dealing with a long-lasting war.

Possible operations, besides the one against Russia, are those already known: Suez, Gibraltar and the British Isles. It is not within the scope of this report to examine these operations, but it should be noted that the control of Russia would create favorable conditions for determining Spain's intervention, providing the supplies it needs, and bending Turkey.

As for the resolution of the Russian question, various elements would propose a solution with the strength that would solve the problem in a more complete way, as in the Germanic directives, would ensure the German armed forces a new and exciting success and definitive liquidate communism and Bolshevik armed forces. This destruction of communism could, in the eyes of Western Europe and also in America, especially in the south, represent a good title for Nazism and eliminate the dangers of an expansion of communism associated with the prolongation of the war. One consideration that could oppose a solution of strength would be to avoid, in the face of world opinion, a new breach of a treaty of friendship; but this violation will not be a serious obstacle to a solution of strength.

For operations against Russia, Germany already has a mass of 115 divisions in Poland, eastern Prussia and Romania, which could be rapidly reinforced with many other divisions from the territory of the Reich. A few months ago at the General Staff I was told that for the operations against Russia there was an initial use of 130 divisions; this number is likely to have increased, given the growing number of large mobility units. About the duration of the operations, the prevailing opinion was about three months, but there are also some who believe that a month may be sufficient to determine the Bolshevik military collapse. An essential element for the rapid development of operations is the use of a large mass of armored and motorized troops and a large mass of aviation. Indispensable element is the dry season exploitation; therefore, the useful time for the implementation of these operations may extend from mid-June to the end of September. Decisions in this regard should also be near.

*The Military Attaché  
Gen. E. L. Marras*

Document n. 4.

TELEGRAM  
MILITARY ATTACHÉ OFFICE IN BERLIN  
TO THE ITALIAN SUPREME COMMAND  
(13 June 1941 – 20:40 hours)

N. 338/S *stop* - Follows my telegram 334/S of 12<sup>th</sup> current *stop*

As a conversation I had today with the Officer of this General Staff I was for the first time admitted that it was against Russia if not near imminent it is very near *stop* I believe I can draw that date would be between 20 current and early July *stop* About forces I have already reported with my sheet 311/S of the 5 current in one hundred and nine divisions they have increased predictably up to 150 *stop*. These increases were also obtained by thinning out large units located in France. Operative plan provides breakage in few places and subsequent deep penetration of armored and motorized units *stop*. Large forces penetrate from Cracovia on Kiev to isolate Ukraine from northern provinces At the same time shares would be directed from Warsaw on Moscow and from Finland on Leningrad *stop* This General Staff does not foresee that Russian resistance arresting overwhelming advance *stop*

Colonel *Badini*

Document n. 5.

TELEGRAM  
OF THE MILITARY ATTACHÉ IN BERLIN  
TO THE ITALIAN SUPREME COMMAND  
(17 June 1941 – 13:00)

347 / S *stop* - Interviewed this morning, this O.K.W. he told me the following 1<sup>st</sup>) - Action against Russia is not imminent 2<sup>nd</sup>) - This night according to news from Finland but not yet confirmed Russians would have done bridges and roads destruction at Ladoga in northern Finland 3<sup>rd</sup>) - Russians have not general mobilization but suspended licenses, recalls and summoned army mass at the West border frontier 4<sup>th</sup>) - Negotiations with Russia for a peaceful solution would have been over for days with an unfavorable outcome and all that remains is to resort to force 5<sup>th</sup>) - Action against Russia will be able to smoothly settle this issue passage through Turkey and opening Dardanelles *stop* Bulk Ukrainian products and Russian oil will have to be transported by sea to Romania and then Danube and from Black Sea and Dardanelles into the Mediterranean 6<sup>th</sup>) - I have been promised

more news in two days *stop* For my own confirmed news sent by telegrams 341 and 344 adding that currently in Berlin Hitler, Ribbentrop, Keitel and General Jodl *stop*

Gen. E. L. Marras

Document n. 6.

TELEGRAM  
FROM THE MILITARY ATTACHÉ IN BERLIN  
TO THE ITALIAN SUPREME COMMAND  
(June 20, 1941 - 13:00)

362/S, 363/S *stop* - O.K.W. current German forces Russian frontier about 150 Divisions, Finnish Border about 12, Hungarian Border around 10, and Romanian border about 20, *stop* More major reserve divisions Soviet forces *stop* O.K.W. confirms military measures Finland, which has 14 divisions that would be reinforced by 4 to 5 German divisions, and Hungary was simply called upon to strengthen Soviet border coverage, which now includes five Army Corps with three mixed brigades *stop* Its intervention is secured *stop* Romania has 27 divisions *stop* German forces Romania would include 8 divisions to which one armored *stop* General Jodl would have our current situation to compete with an Army Corp. He believes that the Army Corp could fit effectively between Romanian forces and Hungarian forces, thus avoiding direct contact between two conflicting nationalities. There is no specification about the size of German forces that I also think that they comprise a total of at least 160 divisions *stop* General Jodl informs me that German-Romanian operations towards Bessarabia will probably start with some delay compared to operations in other sectors *stop*

Gen. E. L. Marras

CAVALLERO DIARY EXCERPTS

Document n. 7.

*From Cavallero Diary, May 30, 1941:*

Hours 12:00. I went to confer with Duce.

The Duce tells me that to provide for the possibility of a conflict between Germany and Russia. We can not be alien to this because it is about fighting communism. It is therefore necessary to establish the constitution between Ljubljana and Zagreb of a motorized division and armored division plus the Division "Granatieri"

Document n. 8.

*From Cavallero Diary, June 9, 1941:*

Hour 20:05. I receive Fornara (\*).

.....

The likelihood of an action in respect of Russia and the more convenient lines. Examine the possible directions (from Hungary to Romania) it is concluded that the most profitable is from Romania for Siret valley.

Forces: The Special Armed Forces with 1 Celere Division [Fast/Cavalry] and 2 truck carried.

Document n. 9.

*From Cavallero Diary, June 15, 1941.*

Hour 09:30. Confer with Fornara about great units on the Eastern theater. Meetings between Germany and Turkey.

.....

Hours 12:00. I go to Duce with von Rintelen (\*\*). Topics:

- Preparation of the Armed Forces for Russia.

Hours 18:35. I go with Marras (\*\*\*) to confer with Duce.

Marras says the German army is keen to fight. Objectives: Leningrad-Moscow - Odessa.

Document n. 10.

*From the Cavallero Diary, June 17, 1941:*

Hours 11:30. Receiving General Rossi. Topics:

- the establishment of a Special Army Corps. Rossi proposes two solutions:

2 divisions celere and 1 armored division;

1 division celere and 2 armored divisions.

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(\*) Lieutenant Colonel of the General Staff Domingo Fornara served in the Supreme Command, as Head of the Organization Office.

(\*\*) General Enna von Rintelen was Military Attaché at the Embassy of Germany in Rome.

(\*\*\*) The General of Division Efsio Marras was Military Attaché at the Italian Embassy in Berlin.



Document n. 11.

*From Cavallero Diary, 19 June 1941:*

08:45 Hours. Received Lt.Col. Fornara. Topics: Major Units for Russia:

\* 1 transportable and 2 Celeri;

\* 1 Celeri and 2 transportable.

It is proposed for the second solution; instead of the Special Armed Forces it would be preferable to carry the Zingales.

Document n. 12.

*From Cavallero Diary, June 20, 1941:*

20:20 Hours. Phone to General Rossi.

Complex Messe (\*). This can become real. So give it under the quick constitution. See if you can give some mortars of 81.

Document n. 13

*From Cavallero Diary, June 21, 1941:*

12:50 Hours. The Duce calls me. Always more live feelings of eastward movement. Apparently the Fuhrer special train is ready, meanwhile, I am accelerating that Army Corps. The self-contained divisions have become two and are reinforced by a mortar battalion for each one. All this with maximum speed. Southern element would not move until a later time (\*\*).

Everything is predisposed.

.....

I think it will take fifteen days.

Transportable Corps.

The Messe Corps that was coming was not set up as a motorized and then moves the Zingales Corps.

.....

Yes, he has the two motorized that are the "Pasubio" and the "Torino" and also have motorized artillery. We respect the organicity of the units.

---

(\*) The General of the Corps Giovanni Messe was the Commander of the Special Army Corps.

(\*\*) It refers to the "Southern" Army Group, which would not take offensive action unless it was some time after the opening of hostilities.

All units remain in their homes ready to go. In conclusion, the Army Corps will have the following units: 1 Celere Division (2 cavalry regiments and 1 bersaglieri regiment), 2 transportabile ("Pasubio" and "Torino") reinforced as I have said, with the Corps that has its artillery all of 105, that is long-range.

The Duce approves.

Document n. 14.

*From Cavallero Diary, June 21, 1941:*

13:00 Hours. Telephone to Scuero (\*).

I give you news of the above.

.....

13:15 Hours. Phone to General Rossi about my call to the Duce.

It will be the Transportable Corps with Zingales. I said that in fifteen days it will be ready.

.....

21:30 Hours. Based on a phone call from General Marras to the Duce. Marras called that there is a chance for tomorrow to the east. Also some other communication, but not important I will tell you later. You summoned the Chief of Staff of that Army Corps. I fear it is not oriented because they are now rather worried about changing the plan from two celere divisions and one transportable to two transportable and a celere division.

Document n. 15.

*From Cavallero Diary, June 22, 1941:*

08:30 Hours. General Magli (\*\*) tells me that at dawn the German troops started operations against Russia.

08:35 Hours. Convoy Gandin (\*\*\*) and commissioned to study the way (also taking contact with Rintelen). See also order with who should make arrangements for the transportation of our Army Corps (200 trains).

---

(\*) The General of the Division Antonio Scuero served as Undersecretary of State of War.

(\*\*) General of Division Giovanni Magli, attached General Staff General.

(\*\*\*) General of Brigade Antonio Gandin, attached to the Supreme Command.

08:40 Hours. Phone to General Rossi. It tells me that 200 trains are needed 20 days.

08:45 Hours. The Duce calls me.

.....

Today I call in Marras to know who we need to make arrangements for transport and what is needed to transport our Army Corps. Additionally, we collect vehicles from different areas and make organic groups to equip the Army with a first mass. Then we will give the others for the infantry transport and the logistical means. 700 come from the 4<sup>th</sup> Army. The transport lasts for twenty days. It is true that we are not ready, but the organicness of the measures allows us to start something very before the expected fifteen days.

.....

The units can have organic completeness. We concentrate on the preparations for the first. (The Duce tells me to start the division first, then the 2<sup>nd</sup>, then the 3<sup>rd</sup> then the Army Corps).

.....

09:25 Hour. General Rossi tells me that with said transport can begin on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

.....

09:35 Hours. Call the Duce to General Magli by assigning him to study if you can send with the said Army even some fifty fighters and a hundred bombers.

10:00 Hours. Call Rossi asking if it is foreseen for the Army Corps sending air reconnaissance. It affirms: thirty aircraft. I say if it can increase.

.....

12:50 Hours. Phone to Pricolo (\*) about Duce's requests for assignment to the east, in addition to reconnaissance. He says he can send forty fighters without prejudice to the Mediterranean and the Adriatic. At my request he adds that 400 people are needed and the foundations of bases. Bombers can not be sent.

.....

18:35 Hours. I attended a meeting with General Rossi and Mr. Scuero.

.....

Army Corps for the East.

Anti-aircraft artillery groups. General Rossi says that we must keep in mind the need for Corsica, I authorize to take the battery of 20 of the "Granatieri" Division.

Reconnaissance Squadrons. They will be escorted by our fighters from Albania.

Quartermaster - Is on hold.

---

(\*) General Francesco Pricolo was Secretary of State and Chief of Staff of Air Force. Minister of Aeronautics was Mussolini himself.

Location of the meeting place for the Army Corps for the east: northern Romania.  
In Germany there are already eight German divisions.

.....  
Lorries. Albania has to cede a vehicle group. I call Fornara and give orders to arrange it.

.....  
My communications this morning to Marras:  
a) where to head for the matter the transport of our Army Corps;  
b) what logistical contribution can Germany give.

.....

Document n. 16.

*From Cavallero Diary, 24 June 1941.*

09:45 Hours. Call the Duce.

The divisions are the "Torino" which is ready and the "Pasubio" (between Venice and Mantova). The third division is in Karlovac (\*) and the command of the Army Corps is in Cremona,

.....  
East Front News. There seems to be a Russian resistance cordon that still holds. Progress would be limited because there is a defensive band. The Germans are looking to break it and then launching armored and motorized units. They believe that the collapse will happen.

.....  
10:35 Hours, Phone Mr. Pricolo that the Duce will review the "Pasubio" on Thursday,

10:45 Hours. Phone to Mr. Scuero.

The Duce will pass in review of the Pasubio in Verona.

.....  
11:40 Hours. Mr. Ciano calls me asking for news. I say that the Germans would encounter about 3 km to 4 km from the frontier, about 3 km from the frontier, with huge anti-tank barriers. They try to break with the infantry and armored vehicles to expand, convinced that after that it will be easy.

.....

---

(\*) The 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division was located in Croatia.

Document n. 17.

*From Cavallero Diary, June 27, 1941:*

13:15 Hours. . . . .

Black Shirts for the Army of the East. Rossi would see a Legion for the Army as a complementary troop.

Machine gun Battalions for the Army Corps. I approve.

Motorized group more. I apologize, but for a while. Anti-tank situation, production, etc., etc. I want full data tomorrow.

The Army Corps do not pass from Romania, but from Hungary to Budapest. News from the Transport Delegation. 7 train blocks. The line has 14 trains per day.

It requires a second company of 47. The Army Corps also needs it. I say the ideal would be to give it 24 to the division and 24 to the Army Corps.

. . . . .

Antitank increase for the East is right, but it must not be at the expense of Libya. So I'm also happy with 16 and 24

Document n. 18

*From Cavallero Diary, June 28, 1941:*

11:15 Hours. Phone to Mr. Favagrossa that I would like to look at the vehicle issue in the evening. Today's situation and the need for a thousand lorries beyond those already required, one needs to see if one can still subtract something from distributions to other large units. You have to have a higher production for a few months because we need to think about Russia and Libya at the same time. For tomorrow I promised the Duce a general framework of availability and production.

. . . . .

11:30 Hours. Telephone to General Rossi.

I spoke to General Giannantoni (\*) about the militia question for the Russian Army Corps. You have to keep it as cadet and materials. We must also provide machine guns, some 81-mortar companies and some anti-tankers. Combine him with a battalion of accompanying weapons (\*\*). To them I said that in the meantime they prepare another legion.

---

(\*) This is the General Lieutenant of M.V.S.N. Ottorino Giannantoni, then Chief of the GS of Training.

(\*\*) The machine gun companies (one for the battalion) were taken from other units of the militia. The battalion of accompanying weapons to complete the legion of the militia for the CSIR was the LXIII formed by the 151<sup>st</sup> Infantry regiment depot and was therefore a battalion of Army infantry.

Document n. 19

*From Cavallero Diary, June 29, 1941:*

Hours . . . . .

Problem with motor vehicles, I talked to the Duce this morning. Arranging the Army Corps for the east has forced us to strip the west front. You need to see how distribution is established and make some adjustments. Mr. Pricolo tells me that his need is a hundred for the fighter group going east.

Document n. 20.

ORDER OF BATTLE  
OF THE ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY CORPS IN RUSSIA  
(TRASPORTABLE ARMY CORPS)  
on date August 1, 1941

*COMMAND*

Commander: Gen. C.A. Giovanni Messe.  
Head of G.S.: Col. Guido Piacenza.  
Cmdr of the Artillery: Gen. B. Francesco Dupont.  
Cmdr of the Engineers: Col. Mario Tirelli.

HEADQUARTERS

Motorized Carabinieri Sections: 193<sup>rd</sup>, 194<sup>th</sup>, 684<sup>th</sup>.  
33<sup>rd</sup> Topographic cartographic Section.  
33<sup>rd</sup> Photographic Section.  
33<sup>rd</sup> Topographic Section for the artillery.  
88<sup>th</sup> Military Post Office.  
Photo cinematographic Unit.  
Automotive squad for the Corps Command  
13<sup>th</sup> Road movement unit.  
1<sup>st</sup> Fuel Section.

DIRECTLY EMPLOYED UNITS

*Infantry.*  
CIV Machine Gun Battalion of the Corps.  
II Battalion 47/32 Anti-tank Cannon.  
1st Bersaglieri Motorcycle Company.

*Artillery.*

30<sup>th</sup> Regimental artillery Group of the Army Corps (Col. Lorenzo Matiotti),  
with groups: LX, LXI and LXII 105/32 cannons;  
Truck mounted groups: IV and XIX anti-aircraft cannons of 75/46;  
Batteries: 95<sup>th</sup> and 97<sup>th</sup> anti-aircraft with 20 mm auto cannons mod. 35

*Engineers.*

IV Artisans Battalion, with: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Company of artisans.

I and IX Engineers sappers Battalion.

VIII connections Battalion, with:

121<sup>st</sup> and 122<sup>nd</sup> Telegraphic Company;  
102<sup>nd</sup> Marconist [Radio] Company;  
20<sup>th</sup> mobile pidgin coop.  
19<sup>th</sup> Road car workshop for connecting vehicles.  
88<sup>th</sup> Motorized Photoelectric searchlight Section.

*Chemists.*

Chemical battalion.  
16<sup>th</sup> Company chemical troops.

*M.V.S.N.*

63<sup>rd</sup> Legion "Tagliamento" (Cmdr. Console Nicolò Nicchiarelli) with:  
LXIII and LXXIX Battalion cc.nn.;  
LXIII Support weapons Battalion (of the Army).

AVIATION

Cmdr Col. Carlo Drago

LXI Observation Group for the Army, with:

Observation Squadrons 34<sup>th</sup>, 119<sup>th</sup>, 128<sup>th</sup>;

XXII Fighter Group, with:

Fighter Squadrons 359<sup>th</sup>, 362<sup>nd</sup>, 369<sup>th</sup>, 371<sup>st</sup>.

SERVICES

*of Health:*

14<sup>th</sup> Health Section.

1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> "Radiological ambulance.

14<sup>th</sup> Dental wound healing.

2<sup>nd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Disinfection Section.

Field Hospitals: 60<sup>th</sup>, 64<sup>th</sup>, 163<sup>rd</sup>, 164<sup>th</sup>, 235<sup>th</sup>, 238<sup>th</sup>, 239<sup>th</sup>, 256<sup>th</sup>, 257<sup>th</sup>, 820<sup>th</sup>, 827<sup>th</sup>, 828<sup>th</sup>, 829<sup>th</sup>,  
830<sup>th</sup>, 831<sup>st</sup>, 837<sup>th</sup>, 838<sup>th</sup>, 873<sup>rd</sup>.

2<sup>nd</sup> and 104<sup>th</sup> Reclamation section for gas.

Chemical, bacteriological, toxicological laboratory.

*of the Commissariat:*

87<sup>th</sup> Subsistence Section.

19<sup>th</sup> Section and 23<sup>rd</sup> Squad Bakery with Rotary Furnaces.

*of Veterinarian:*

2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> draft animal infirmary.

*Transportation:*

82<sup>nd</sup> baggage Unit.

2<sup>nd</sup> Automotive grouping of the Army (Cmdr. Col. Ginesio Ninchi) with:

- XXIX Heavy Automotive Group with:  
Heavy automotive unit: 33<sup>rd</sup>, 34<sup>th</sup>, 96<sup>th</sup>, 97<sup>th</sup>;
- II Mixed automotive unit with:  
Heavy automotive unit: 26<sup>th</sup>, 32<sup>nd</sup>, 91<sup>st</sup>;  
Light automotive unit: 116<sup>th</sup>;  
228<sup>th</sup> Mixed automotive unit;  
51<sup>st</sup> Ambulance automotive unit.

15<sup>th</sup> Workshop of auto group.

8<sup>th</sup> Street Rescue Unit.

13<sup>th</sup> Street Rescue Unit.

#### CSIR MILITARY WAR CRIMES TRIBUNAL

President: Col. G. Batt. Costa

#### *"PASUBIO" (9<sup>th</sup>) TRANSPORTABLE DIVISION* COMMAND

Commander: Gen. Vittorio Giovanelli.

Chief of the G.S.: Lt. Col. Umberto Ricca.

#### HEADQUARTERS

Carabinieri sections motorized: 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>.

9<sup>th</sup> Automotive squad for Div. Cmdr..

91<sup>st</sup> Fuel section.

9<sup>th</sup> Roadway rescue unit.

8<sup>th</sup> Roadway Movement unit.

I photo-cinema group.

83rd Military Post Office.

#### INFANTRY

Infantry Division Cmdr: Gen. B. Aldo Princivale.

79<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt "Roma" (Col. Rocco Blasioli) on:

Command and Company Command of Regiment;

Mortar Company of 81 mm.;

65/17 accompanying weapons Battery;

Battalions (I, II and III), each with:

- Command and Companion Command of Battalion;
- three rifle companies;
- Accompanying weapon company (machine guns and mortars of 81).



*80<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt. "Roma" (Cmdr. Col. Epifanio Chiaramonti) with:*

- Command and Command Company of Regiment;
- 81 mm. mortar Company;
- 65/17 Accompanying weapon Battery;
- Battalions (I, II and III), each with:
  - Command and Company Command of Battalion;
  - three rifle companies;
  - Accompanying weapon company (machine guns and mortars of 81 mm.).

V and IX Mortar Battalions of 81 mm.

9<sup>th</sup> and 141<sup>st</sup> 47/32 Anti-tank Companies.

#### ARTILLERY

*8<sup>th</sup> Motorized Artillery Regiment (Cmdr. Col. Alfredo Reginella) with:*

- Command and Command of Regt .;
- I Motorized Group of 100/17;
- II and III Motorized cannons of 75/27;
- Ammunition and food unit.

85<sup>th</sup> and 309<sup>th</sup> Anti-aircraft Battery with auto cannon - machine Gun 20 mm mod. 35.

#### ENGINEERS

30<sup>th</sup> artisans engineer Company.

9<sup>th</sup> Telegraphic and radiotelegraphic engineer company,

95<sup>th</sup> Photoelectric [searchlight] Section.

#### SERVICES

*of Health:*

5<sup>th</sup> Health Section.

Field Hospitals: 825<sup>th</sup>, 826<sup>th</sup>, 836<sup>th</sup>, 874<sup>th</sup>.

25<sup>th</sup> Surgical unit.

*of the Commissariat:*

11<sup>th</sup> Subsistence Section.

26<sup>th</sup> Bakery squad with rolling ovens.

#### *CARRYING (52<sup>nd</sup>) "TORINO" TRANSPORTABLE DIVISION*

##### COMMAND

Commander: Gen. Luigi Manzi.

Chief of the G.S.: Lt. Col. Umberto Scalcino.

##### HEADQUARTERS

Motorized Carabinieri Sections: 56<sup>th</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup>.

52<sup>nd</sup> Automotive squad for Div. Cmd..

52<sup>nd</sup> Fuel section.

52<sup>nd</sup> Roadway rescue unit.

5th Movement Road Unit.

II Cinema Photo Group.

152<sup>nd</sup> Military Post Office.

#### INFANTRY

Cmd. Infantry Divisional: Col. i.g.s. Ugo De Carolis.

81<sup>st</sup> Inf. Regt. "*Torino*" (Cmdr. Col. Carlo Piccinini) with:

Command and Regiment Command Company;

81 mm. Mortar Company;

Accompanying weapon company of 47/32;

Battalions (I, II and IU), each with:

- Command and Companion Command of Battalion;
- Three rifle companies;
- Company of accompanying weapon (machine guns and mortars of 81).

82<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Regt. "*Torino*" (Cmdr. Col. Evaristo Fioravanti) with:

Command and Company Command of the Regiment;

Mortar Company of 81 mm.;

Accompanying weapon company of 47/32;

Battalions (I, II and III), each with:

Command and Companion Command of the Battalion;

- three rifle companies;
- Accompanying weapon company (machine guns and mortars of 81 mm.).

XXVI and LII Mortar Battalion of 81 mm.

52<sup>nd</sup> and 171<sup>st</sup> anti-tank company of 47/32.

#### ARTILLERY

52<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Motorized Artillery (Cmdr. Col. Giuseppe Ghiringhelli) with:

Command and Command unit of Regt .;

I Motorized Howitzer Group of 100/17;

II and III Motorized cannons of 75/27;

Ammunition and food unit.

352<sup>nd</sup> and 361<sup>st</sup> Anti-aircraft with auto-cannons of 20 mm Mod. 35.

#### ENGINEERS

57<sup>th</sup> Artisan Engineer Company.

52<sup>nd</sup> telegraphist and radiotelegraphist Engineer company.

69<sup>th</sup> Photoelectric Section.

#### SERVICES

*of Health:*

52<sup>nd</sup> health Section

Field Hospitals: 89<sup>th</sup>, 90<sup>th</sup>, 117<sup>th</sup>, 578<sup>th</sup>.

52<sup>nd</sup> Surgery.

*of the Commissariat:*

52<sup>nd</sup> Lecture Section.

65<sup>th</sup> Bakery squad with rolling ovens.

*3<sup>rd</sup> CELERE DIVISION "PRINCIPLES AMEDEO DUCA D'AOSTA"*  
COMMAND

Commander: Gen. Mario Marazzani.

Deputy Commander: Gen. Joachim Solinas.

Chief of the G.S.: Lt. Col. Dandolo Battaglini.

HEADQUARTERS

355<sup>th</sup> and 356<sup>th</sup> Celere Carabinieri Section.

3<sup>rd</sup> vehicle squad.

7<sup>th</sup> Movement Road unit.

III Photo-cinematographic Group.

40<sup>th</sup> Military Post Office

*3<sup>rd</sup> Bersaglieri Regiment.*

Commander: Col. Atamto Caretto.

Command and Command Company of the Regiment.

Three Bersaglieri Battalions (XVIII, XX, XXV).

Two Bersaglieri Motorcycle companies (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>).

122<sup>nd</sup> Light truck unit.

*172<sup>nd</sup> and 173<sup>rd</sup> Anti-tank Cannon Company.*

*"Savoy Cavalry" Regiment*

Commander: Col. Weiss Poccetti.

Command and Command Squadron of the Regiment.

Two Squadron Groups, with:

Command;

two Cavalry Squadrons (or Lancers).

5<sup>th</sup> machine gun Squadrons.

*"Novara Lancieri" Regiment.*

Commander: Col. Egidio Giusiana.

Command and Squadron Command of the Regiment.

Two Squadron Groups, with:

Command;

two Cavalry Squadrons (or Lancers).

5<sup>th</sup> Machine guns Squadrons.

*93<sup>rd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> Anti-aircraft batteries with 20 mm 35 mod. auto -cannons*

*3<sup>rd</sup> Horse Artillery Regiment.*

Commander: Col. Cesare Colombo.

Command and Regiment Command unit.

Three horse artillery groups with two 75/27 1912 mod. cannon batteries.

*III Fast Tank Group San Giorgio.*

ENGINEERS

105<sup>th</sup> Company of Craftsmen for Celere Division.

103<sup>rd</sup> Company of Radio Telegraphic engineers for Celere Division.

SERVICES

*of Health:*

73<sup>rd</sup> Health Care Section.

Field Hospitals: 46<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup>, 148<sup>th</sup>, 159<sup>th</sup>.

20<sup>th</sup> Surgery.

*of the Commissariat:*

93<sup>rd</sup> Subsistence Section.

59<sup>th</sup> Bakery squad with rotary ovens.

*Mechanical Transport:*

213<sup>th</sup> Mixed truck unit.

Document n. 21.

COMPOSITION OF THE ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY CORPS IN RUSSIA  
(TRASPORTABLE ARMY CORPS)

July 1941 - March 1942

UNITS OF THE ARMY CORPS

3 sections motorized Carabinieri.

2 rifle battalions (Black Shirts).

3 battalions of accompanying weapons.

1 battalions of sappers.

1 autonomous bersaglieri motorcycle company.

5 artillery groups (of which: 3 of 105/32 for 9 batteries and 36 pieces, 2 of 75/46 anti-aircraft for 4 batteries and 16 pieces).

2 autonomous 20 mm anti-aircraft batteries.

4 battalions of engineers (of which: 1 of artisans, 1 of connections, 2 of sappers).

1 chemical battalions.

9 mortars of 81 mm. (of mortar company of LXIII mortar battalion of accompanying weapons of the Tagliamento Legion).

32 pieces of 47/32 (24 of the A/T battalion + 8 of the company of 47 to 32 of the LXIII battalion of accompanying weapons).

*Services.*

18 field hospitals, 1 health section, 2 radiological ambulances, 1 dental ambulance, disinfection section, 2 carbonated reclamation sections, 1 chemical - bacteriological - toxicological laboratory with anti - rabid center.

3 subsistence sections, section bakers with ovens, 2 bakers squads with ovens.

The workshop for connecting materials.

2 animal infirmaries.

1 Railway train unit, 14 Heavy Truck units, 1 Light truck units, 1 Mixed unit, 1 Ambulance unit, 2 Heavy automotive Workshops.

1 road movement battalion, 1 road militia centuries, 2 roadside rescue units with 5 squads.

1 special rest stop command, 2 main rest stop commands, 3 rest stop commands secondary, 6 main rest stop offices, 3 mobile territorial battalions, 1 garrison company, 1 worker group.

2 Military post offices.

"PASUBIO" DIVISION

2 motorized Carabinieri sections.

6 rifle battalions.

2 mortar battalions.

4 autonomous companies (of which: 2 – 81 mm. mortar companies of the regiments and 2 47/32 A/T companies, divisional).

3 artillery groups (of which: 1 of 100/17 for 3 batteries and 12 pieces, 2 of 75/27 mode 1911 for 6 batteries and 24 pieces).

4 autonomous batteries (of which: 2 of 65/17 accompanying for 8 pieces and 21 anti-aircraft of 20 mm. of the division for 16 pieces).

2 autonomous companies of the engineers (of which: 1 artisan and 1 of the radio).

72 mortars of 81 mm. (of the 6 divisional battalions and 2 regiment companies).

16 of from 47/32 of the 2 companies divisional A/T.

*Services.*

4 field hospitals, health section, 1 surgical center.

1 subsistence section, 1 bakers squad with ovens.

1 roadside rescue unit, the road-building unit.

1 garage.

1 military post office.

"TORINO" DIVISION

2 motorized Carabinieri sections.

5 rifle battalions.

2 mortar battalions.

6 autonomous companies (of which: 2 of 47/32 of regimental accompaniment, 2 of 81 mortal mortars, 2 of 47/32 division divisions).

3 artillery groups (of which: 1 from 100/17 for 3 batteries and 12 pieces, 2 of 75/27 mode 1911 for 6 batteries and 24 pieces).

2 autonomous divisional anti-aircraft batteries of 20 mm. for 16 pieces.  
2 autonomous companies of the engineers (of which: 1 of artisans and 1 of radio).  
72 mortars of 81 mm. (of the 6 divisional battalions and 2 regiment companies).  
28 pieces of 47/32 (16 of the two divisional A/T companies, 12 of the regimental accompaniment companies).

*Services.*

4 field hospitals, 1 Health Section, 1 Surgical Surgery.  
1 subsistence section, 1 bakers squad with ovens.  
1 roadside rescue center, 1 road movement unit.  
1 garage,  
1 Military post office.

3<sup>rd</sup> CELERE DIVISION "PRINCIPE AMEDEO DUCA D'AOSTA"

2 motorized Carabinieri sections.  
3 truck transportable bersaglieri battalions.  
3 autonomous companies (of which: 1 of motorcycle bersaglieri and 2 of 47/32 A/T Divisional).  
2 cavalry regiments (4 squad groups each of 2 squadrons and 2 squadron machine guns).  
1 "L" Tank group (3 tons, 61 tanks in 4 squadrons).  
3 artillery groups on horseback (6 batteries of 75/27 1912 mode for 24 pieces).  
2 autonomous batteries of 20 mm. divisional anti-aircraft for 16 pieces.  
2 autonomous companies of the engineers (of which: 1 of artisans and 1 of telemarconists).  
no mortars.  
16 pieces of 47/32 of the 2 divisional A/T.

*Services.*

4 field hospitals, 1 health section, 1 surgical center.  
1 subsistence section, 1 team squad with ovens.  
1 roadside relief unit, 1 road-building unit.  
1 mixed truck unit, 1 automotive repair shop.  
The military post office.

TOTAL OF THE CSIR

62,000 men.  
17 Infantry Rifle Battalions (of which: 12 of line infantry, 3 of bersaglieri, 2 of black shirts).  
7 battalions of accompanying weapons.  
1 battalion of sappers.  
14 autonomous companies (of which: 2 of motorcyclists, 4 of mortars of 81 mm., 8 of 47/32).  
10 Cavalry Squads (of which: 8 Cavalry Squadron and 2 machine guns Squadron).  
4 "L" groups (61 wagons).  
14 artillery groups (of which: 3 of 105/32, for 9 batteries with 36 pieces; 2 of 100/17, for 6 batteries with 24 pieces; 7 of 75/27, for 18 batteries with 72 pieces; 2 of 75/46 anti-aircraft, for 8 batteries with 32 pieces).

10 autonomous batteries (of which: 2 of 65/17 for 8 pieces and 8 of 20 mm. anti-aircraft for 64 pieces).

4 battalions of engineers (of which: 1 of artisans, 1 of connections, 2 of sapper).

6 independent engineer companies (of which 3 are artisans and 3 connections).

1 chemical battalions.

153 mortar of 81.

92 pieces of 47/32.

*Services.*

30 field hospitals, 4 health sections, 2 radiological ambulances, 1 dental ambulance, 3 surgical centers, 2 carbonated reclamation sections, disinfection section, chemical-bacteriological-toxicological laboratory with anti-rabid center.

6 subsistence sections, 1 section bakers with ovens, 5 bakers squads with ovens.

2 pack animal infirmary.

1 railway train unit, 14 heavy truck units, 2 mixed truck units, 1 light truck unit, 1 ambulance delivery unit, 2 heavy duty workshops, 5 roadside rescue, 1 roadway emergency unit.

1 road movement battalion, 1 militia century of the road, 3 road construction units, 3 garage.

1 special rest area command, 2 main rest area commands, 3 rest area commands secondary, 6 main rest area offices, 3 mobile territorial battalions, 1 garrison company, 1 workers group.

5 Military post offices.

Moreover, the CSIR Special Intent was set up in various "Logistic Centers" warehouses (or warehouse fractions) for health services, commissariat (one for food, oats, forage, straw, wood and one for clothing) and equipment), artillery, engineer (with semifinal workshop and 12 mobile workshops), automotive (with laboratory).

Document n. 22.

DISTRIBUTION FOR CALIBRATES  
OF THE ARTILLERY CANNONS  
DIRECTLY EMPLOYED BY:

*CSIR Command:*

Cal. 20 mm A/A.	16 (2 batteries)
Cal. 75/46 A/A.	16 (2 groups with 2 batteries)
Cal. 105/32.	36 (3 groups with 3 batteries)

*"Pasubio" Division Command:*

Cal. 20 mm A/A.	16 (2 batteries)
Cal. 65/17.	8 (2 Accompanying Batteries)
Cal. 75/27 mod. 1911	24 (2 groups with 3 batteries)
Cal. 100/17 mod. 1914.	12 (1 group with 3 batteries)

*"Torino" Division Command:*

Cal. 20 mm A/A ...	16 (2 batteries)
Cal. 75/27 mod. 1911	24 (2 groups with 3 batteries)
Cal. 100/17 mod. 1914.	12 (1 group with 3 batteries)

*"3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division" Command:*

Cal. 20 mm A/A	16 (2 batteries)
Cal. 75/27 mod. 1912	24 (3 groups with 2 batteries)

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*Total of CSIR 220 cannons*  
47 batteries

Document n. 23.

CAVALLERO DIARY EXCEPTS

*From Diary Cavallero, July 25, 1941:*

09:35 Hours. Telephone to Mr. Scuero. Topic:

Expeditionary Corps to the East: Only one division has the vehicles; the other had to have them from Albania, but these did not arrive and this would lead to employ the G.U. piecemeal. You have to get some of it from the reservations of Col. Girola (\*) at the companies. The figure is not relevant because it is good part of the division is already motorized.

Hours 11:05. Telephone to Mr. Scuero. Subject: 400 trucks missing and 150 trailers for the Expeditionary Corps to the East.

Hours 12.50. Telephone to Mr. Prestinari. The Duce gave me a letter about the vehicles. We have to send it 600 to Russia. We considered taking them from Albania but we can not.

You must give proof of goodwill. Those are the 53 that Agostini (\*\*) has.

---

(\*) Colonel of Artillery Enrico Guido Girola was in charge of the Automotive Technical Service.

(\*\*) Lieutenant General Augusto Agostini was the commander of the "Regimental Group Agostini", a unit formed by Military Forces units.



17:45 Hours. Telephone to Mr. Scuero. Topic: 400 trucks arrive from Germany. It is advisable to keep them in Italy for possible spare parts difficulties. We send to the East those we have. Agostini he will have to give his.

.....

We will soon send the trucks to Russia that are still missing for one of the already allocated divisions. Anyway I remember von Rintelen that their divisions did walk 50 km a day by loading their backpacks on trucks.

Document n. 24.

COMMAND  
OF THE ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY CORPS IN RUSSIA  
OFFICE OPERATIONS

*Secret!*

ORDER OF OPERATIONS N. 1

N. 3797 of prot. Op.

P.M. 88 / R, July 26, 1941, XIX

Subject: Motor transport of the "Pasubio" division into the area of probable use.

Topographical Maps: 1:200,000 - Sheets: 4349 - 4449 - 4549 - 4649 - 4749 - 4348 - 4448 - 4548 - 4648 - 4748 - 4848 - 4347 - 4447 - 4547 - 4647 - 4747 - 4847.

<i>To Infantry Division Command "Pasubio"</i>	P.M. 83 / R
<i>To the Transport Director of C.S.</i>	Felso Viso
<i>At Command 2<sup>nd</sup> Truck Group of the Army</i>	P. Military
<i>At Command Bers. Motorcyclists Co.</i>	Salcea

and, for knowledge:

<i>To the Command 11<sup>th</sup> German Army</i>	P. Militare
<i>To the Command Infantry Division "Torino"</i>	P.M. 152/R
<i>To the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division Command "P.A.D.A."</i>	P.M. 40/R
<i>To the Artillery Command of C.S.I.R.</i>	Headquarters
<i>To the Engineer Command of C.S.I.R.</i>	Headquarters
<i>To the Special Quartermaster "East"</i>	P.M. 102
<i>To the Services of the C.S.I.R.</i>	Headquarters
<i>To the Senior Officer of the CCRR.</i>	Headquarters

I. - The 11<sup>th</sup> Army German operating at the far south of the allied deployment, broke the resistance against the Nistro and successfully pursued its action in depth.

The Italian Expeditionary Corps, in reserve of the Army, must be brought to Nistro in the direction of Jampol.

II. - The "Pasubio" division, truck transportable, will start first moving, to reach the Iswory - Pol area for the first phase.

III. - *Organization of the movement.*

1) *Itinerary*: Suceava - Botosani - Stefanesti - Sagajkany - Rischkanowka - Belzy - Iswory - Pol.

2) Stages: nr. 4, with the following rest areas:

- 1<sup>st</sup> day: Botosani - Trusesti;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> day: Stefanesti - Sagajkany;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> day: Ritschi - Belzy;
- 4<sup>th</sup> day: Iswory - Pol.

3) *Echelons*: by Regiment with the following sequence:

- a infantry Regt. and 1<sup>st</sup> cp. motorcyclists (who from the 27<sup>th</sup> pass to the dependence of the "Pasubio" division):
- artillery regiment;
- divisional T. and S.;
- a infantry Regt.

4) The XXIX automobile group, in charge of the carriage, will have to move in the area of Capu Codruluni - Cornu Luncii for 18:00 of the 28<sup>th</sup>.

The Commander of the automobile Group will present as soon as possible to the Infantry division "Pasubio" command to loading sites receive orders and transport modes.

5) The regular unfolding of the movement of the column must be ensured with the divisional road movement unit.

6) *Start of the carriage*: first hours of the 30<sup>th</sup>.

IV. - *Organization of the itineraries*: by the Transport Directorate, which will insert the Bn. road movement elements, into the Germanic organization in progress, with agreements with the Transport Directorate of the 11<sup>th</sup> German Army.

V. - *Security.*

Of paramount importance, in the contingent situation, has anti-aircraft defense, which must be scrupulously assured in march and parked.

In the nighttime rest areas, arrange appropriate guard and protection service from any infiltration of paratroopers.

VI. - *Connections.*

The division may lean on the following centers of the German 11<sup>th</sup> Army (AOK 11) Botosani - Stefanesti - Sagajkany - Belzy - Soroki.

VII. *Accommodation*: only camps are allowed: exceptionally you can use some rooms in the villages of the rest area.

VIII. - *Drive discipline*: You need a strict driving discipline, keeping it bearing in mind that the traffic of the Army is on the same roads.

Even during short stops the roads and bridges must be kept free, so as to ensure the continuity of transit in both directions.

IX. - *Services*: separate orders.

X. - The "Pasubio" Division Command notifies this Command daily:

- departure hours;

- arrival hours;

- any news.

The General of the Corps  
Commander  
Giovanni Messe

Document n. 25.

HIGH COMMAND 11<sup>th</sup> ARMY

Section No 3487/41 Segr.

HQ, July 31, 1941

Ref. A.O.K. 11 No 3409/41 Segr. of July 21, 1941.

*To Italian Expeditionary Corps*

to German Links Officer.

1. - *The progress of the situation* requires an advance of the Italian Expeditionary Corps in the area

Goraba - Plot - Pisarewka - Studenoje - Sagnitkov.

The Corps continues its march in the formation so far maintained in the summoned area.

Order of march and daily goals according to the provisions of the Corps

Command. The Army waits for the Corps to be the most late on August 10, 1941, can begin its movement in the area to meet with at least two divisions and sufficient troops.

2. - The first *task* of the Expeditionary Corps will presumably be to sweep the ground between the LIV and XXX C.A. and to restore communications between the two Corps.

3. - For the *march* from the Dnjestr, the Corps will use the first phase the road of army supplies Jampol - Olschanka up to Dmitraschkowka and from here it will move in the following strip of movement:

*border on the right towards IV C.A. Romanian: from Dnjestr up to excluded Raschkow, Ksendzokwka - Molino very close to southwest Gorabb - Carschunowka (all in Romanian IV C.A. );*  
*left border to XXX C.A.: Dmitraschkowka parish – margin southwest of Beschpinkow - north Pisarewka - Labuschnaja Trutyie and north margin Nowslobodseja (all to the XXX C.A.).*

4. - For the forward march to the east of the Dnjestr is arranged: The road from Jampol to Dmitraschkowka can be included used only in the hours from 06:00 to 10:00 and from 16:00 to 20:00. In the other hours of the day and night it is at the disposal of the supply traffic. This time must be kept in the most accurate manner; immediately free the road during the ordered hours even if the travel target had not been achieved. This is absolutely necessary to ensure supplies to the Army. For the remainder it is valid as laid down in the provisions for supply to marches.

5. - *Connections.*

The Corps has to the east of the Dnjestr initially connected with the Army through the connecting posts of the Army to Jampol and Olschanka. Besides Olschanka the connection through the Army.

*Radio Link* for the time being. During the march, the radios do not have to work within the limits of the Corps.

6. Of the occurred movements must be given communication, as the provisions of reference to the marches order.

General *von Schobert*

Document n. 26.

COMMAND  
OF THE ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY CORPS IN RUSSIA  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

*Secret!*

OPERATIONAL ORDERS No. 4

No. 4000 of lawn Op.

P.M. 88 / R, August 2, 1941. XIX

*Subject:* Deployment of the Corps..

Map: 1:200,000 - Sheets: Soroki - Balta - Bendery.

*At the Infantry Division Command "Pasubio"* P.M. 83/R

*At Infantry Division Command "Torino"* P.M. 152/R

*At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division Command "P.A.D.A. "* P.M. 40/R

<i>To the Artillery Command of C.S.</i>	Headquarters
<i>To the Engineer Command of C.S.</i>	Headquarters

and, for knowledge:

<i>To the Command 11<sup>th</sup> German Army</i>	Post Military
<i>To the Office of Services C.S.</i>	Headquarters
<i>To the Department of Transportation C.S.</i>	Headquarters
<i>To the Aeronautical Command of C.S.</i>	Headquarters

I. - The action of the 11<sup>th</sup> Army German, as far as concerns the Corps, has achieved the following results:

XXX Corps: (in the direction of Jampol - Dmitraschkowka - Krutyje) has reached Krutyje, surpassing strong enemy resistance.

IV Corps Romanian: (acts in the Raschkow - Molokisch direction) has forced the Nistro to form a bridgehead at Raschkow;

LIV Corps: (acts in the direction of Dubossary - Karmanowa) has reached and advanced, with advanced elements, Karmanowa.

II - The development of this situation requires the use of C.S. which must reach the deployment zone Goraba - Plot - Pisarewka - Studenoje - Sagnitkow, with advanced elements on the Coraba - Plot.

From this line the Corps will go through Germanic the XXX Corps and - in the first phase - the IV Romanian Corps.

III. - The movement will take place:

a) up to Dmitraschhourtça, along the rolling Jampol – Dmitraschkowka (available only from 06:00 to 10:00 and from 16:00 to 20:00);

b) beyond, in the delimited sector:

- *to the north* - east from the Dmitraschkowka line - south - west margin of Beschinkow - north margin of Nowslobodseja (location of the XXX Corps.);

- *to the southwest*, from the connecting Dniestr to Raschkow (excluded) - Ksendzokwka - southwest Goraba - Gerschunowka (location at IV Corps Romania).

IV. - I intend to collect two infantry divisions and the artillery of Corps in the deployment zone, to move as soon as possible with the combined forces.

V. - *As a consequence:*

1st - *The Pasubio division* after having discharged into the east intersection zone Scholkani - Soroki (excluded) stays on day 3 in the Jampol–Soroki area (excluded locations - rolling shuttles).

Return, for example, the movement at dawn of day 4, presenting with head to Jampol bridges at 06:00.

Reach in normal Olschanka stages using the itinerary Jampol - Olschanka at established hours. The road in the hours not granted (0 - 6, 10 - 16, 20 - 24) must be left free, though

the objective of the march will not be reached. This is absolutely true necessary to secure the supplies of the Army.

At its disposal to form base: Jampol,

Orders reserve for the continuation of the move beyond Olschanka.

2<sup>nd</sup> - *The Torino division* continues the movements per v.o. [your orders] to the area where it will be loaded.

Unloading - parking - resumption of movement per v.o. from Jampol: at the time, as for the *Pasubio division*.

It will reach the Olschanka area. Waiting of orders for the continuation of the movement.

At your proposal, to form a base: Soroki.

3<sup>rd</sup> - *The Celere division* will soon concentrate its units in the area south of Soroki and east of the Ivory - Soroki highway (locations excluded).

4<sup>th</sup> - *T. and S. of the Corps* as they flow into the Botosani area, the movement for the deployment area will continue. Detailed orders will follow.

5<sup>th</sup> - The Transportation Unit provides:

- the transport of the "*Torino*" division to the transport of the "*Pasubio*" division;
- to the transport of the elements of the Corps not truck-mounted, carried out transport of the "*Torino*" division.

6<sup>th</sup> - Artillery Command: Provide that, after the movement of the "*Torino*" division, the anti-aircraft groups take position to protect the deployment zone of the G.U..

Reserve to order for the meeting of the 30<sup>th</sup> artillery grouping of the Corps.

7<sup>th</sup> - Engineer Command:

- Recognize promptly to recognize and carry out the necessary and possible work to ensure traffic in the Corps movement sector;
- Organize links, keeping in mind that for the connection with the army, are in the center of Jampol and Olschanka. After passing Olschanka, he will provide the army to link with the Corps

Link axis: Botosani - Belzy - Jampol - Olschanka.

Radio traffic: strictly forbidden for the duration of the transfers until the deployment zone.

8th - Services: Separate orders.

9th - Command: from 18:00 on the 9<sup>th</sup> at Olschanka.

The General of the Corps  
Commander  
*Giovanni Messe*

COMMAND 80<sup>th</sup> INFANTRY "ROMA"  
*"In the name of Roma"*

N. 2160 of prot./Op,

Tschigirin, 19 August 1941. XIX

*Subject:* Report on the fights held on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1941.

Map: 1:100.000 L 36 I Ost and L 36 IV Ost.

*To Division Commander the Pasubio Infantry*

and, for knowledge:

*To the Commander of the Infantry Division of the Pasubio Division*

Military Post 83/R

At 11.30 of 11<sup>th</sup> current month the column under my orders, avant-garde of the "Pasubio" Division, constituted by the organic regiment, from the III Group of the 8<sup>th</sup> Artillery "Pasubio", by the 1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri motorcycle company, by the 141<sup>st</sup> company 47/32 anti-tank guns, from the 1<sup>st</sup> mortar company of 81mm of the IX divisional mortar battalion "Pasubio", by the 3<sup>rd</sup> mortar company of 81 mm of the V mortar battalion, by a section of the divisional 20 mm battery, by a platoon of the divisional engineers and by two R.F. 3 A stations, in a total of 4,500 men, under orders to move from Wosnessensk, where he had left the afternoon of the previous day to resume the march, always the vanguard of the "Pasubio", along the itinerary Jastrebinovo – to southwest of Pokrowskoje - Jasnaja Poljana - Trichatj - Nikolajew.

*Assignment:* Move quickly to Nikolajew to stand in front of the enemy trying to escape beyond that location.

Formations: see Annex no. 1.

At 13:00, the Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri motorcycle Company to my vanguard sensed that his advanced elements had hit enemy resistance of imprecise height to the road that passes Rjuminskij after hill 80, so he had arranged the appropriate recon. Immediately afterwards the column was marked by artillery strikes, and they began to hear even rounds of machine guns.

Take me immediately forward, from the extent of the fire front, and from the news that the Bersaglieri were already beginning to reach me, I guess it was a unit of not significant entity, a company at most, while the consistency of the artillery unit was still undefended.

I therefore decided to act by engaging with only the avant-garde head battalion, the III, with all its reinforcing elements, while I ordered:

- the second battalion in formation, the I, to be ready for any eventuality, truck-mounted;

- to Major Rossi, Commander of the III Group 75/27, to deploy the battery that was with the head of the avant-garde;

- to Lieutenant Grassi, running the 65/17 battery, to jump over all and immediately get to the right of the 47 mm guns at the head of the avant-garde.

Therefore, while the exploration platoon, already stationed, began its move to reach the target patrols, and Major Minchiotti reorganized the bulk of the battalion, the 10<sup>th</sup> company, under the command of Lieutenant Martelli, the tip of the vanguard, was certainly thrown on the road left with the task of contributing to an encirclement maneuver of some enemy advanced elements that Commander of the company, Captain Dinali Leoni, he had brilliantly started on his right with his bersaglieri.

Meanwhile, close behind was the rest of the battalion. In that moment there appeared on the right side of the bersaglieri 7 tanks. From the position in which the 47 mm. pieces were located, already ready on the ground, were not visible and therefore not they could intervene right away. Give then the command to Captain Cara in, commanding the cannon company, to move even further and open without a doubt, as soon as possible, fire with his pieces.

Meanwhile, the enemy continued to alternate the fire of the battery on us and on the right side of a Hungarian column we saw clearly, and descending to the left of the Bug to New Odessa. This column, in fact, was heavily bombed by aviation, while my era was subjected only to an incursion, with the launch of a few bombs and machine guns in the sector of the 4<sup>th</sup> company, but without consequences. The bersaglieri and battalion recon had captured in the meantime some prisoners, including an artillery sergeant, who claimed that armies of machine guns and a cavalry battery were ahead but that, under our pressure, they would be retreat.

Meanwhile I was aware of a serious detail, that is, that my II battalion (third in formation) and the Division's command were unable to move from the starting area due to a sudden, violent downpour that had bogged them, and there was also an accident: a jumble on which only the company could pass with its reinforcement elements, 75/27 battery and battery of 65/17, it crashed and all the bulk of the column that was with me remained cut off, impossible to come by truck. There the column at that time had a depth of not less than 5 - 6 km. The engineer artisans platoon immediately began building a deviation of track, unable to repair the bridge with the light materials it had, work that took about two hours. The action continued with success by the elements involved, and around 16:00, my situation came to be the following: the motorcycle company and the leading company, with two platoons 47/32, engaged astride the road, the bersaglieri on the right, pressed on the enemy, who folded; the rest of the battalion III, on foot, moving to pin down, already assembled and in the hand of its commander, a 75/27 battery, and the 65/17 battery already deployed ready for both support and anti-tank shooting; the I battalion, truck carried, ready beyond the bend in the roadway, while the II as above was remained awaited in the starting area at about 30 km.

Overall, I was left with a battalion and a battery less, and without any support from my General or others



ignoring the general situation. To keep in mind also, that the I Battalion was a company short because it was previously sent for special assignment elsewhere. At that time, under those conditions, isolated at that distance, I only had one decision to take: get rid of the elements I had first, to gather my strength and stay in the most suitable area of the one I was in, waiting for the Division to resume the movement.

Give therefore the order to Lieutenant Martelli to push his action deeper, as the enemy retreated, without ever hearing his battery, and that the tanks had, after the fleeting appearance, vanished without not even to have done fire, while with all the big push below, advancing the already deployed batteries. So I walk around another 3 km, making sure the village of Pokrowskoje was clear, as I was referring to the explorers who I had decided to stop and give it to the commander of the Division with the attached note no. 2. Immediately afterwards, however, the General received the attached note no. 3 who approved my decision, even though he had not known it yet.

About 22:00, a German patrol, led by me, was presented to me an officer. He told me that he belonged to the 47<sup>th</sup> infantry of the 22<sup>nd</sup> division, who had fought hard in the southwestern area of Wosnessensk, and that his regiment was going to settle down at Dmitryjiewka, where it would arrive at 10:00 on the following day; that other units went south.

The night was quiet while the enemy broke the contact.

Thus ended the episode of the 11<sup>th</sup>, which can be considered as the battle of the 12<sup>th</sup>, near Jasnaja Poljana, since the enemy's intent was to carry out only a delaying and disturbance action, without letting himself engage in a real fight, something that was possible only because of the blown bridge that had not allowed me to fully and promptly provide all of my vehicles and units.

They were captured during the action, 38 prisoners, 2 very powerful machine guns, various submachine guns and rifles, a portable field radio station and numerous other materials, including two limbers with 5 horses of the battery.

Our Losses: 2 dead and 3 injured.

I have no idea of the losses suffered by the opponent; but the next day, several corpses were found, including an artillery officer.

The action of this day, if it had been modest in its size, confirmed to me the combative ardor and the spirit of sacrifice of my units, motorcycle bikers and artillerymen.

#### THE BATTLE OF JASNAJA POLJIANA (12 August 1941, XIX)

On the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup>, after a quiet night on the positions reached on the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup>, came from General Giovanelli

there is a note, attached no. 4, from which I learned the general situation. The bulk of the Division was always mired above Wosnessensk. About 10:00, given the communication I had had on the evening before the German patrol, and since I had noticed behind me in the north-northwest movements of German troops, I sent an officer of my command to Dmitriewka to contact the 47<sup>th</sup> German infantry who should have been here already. And in fact, my officer, Lieutenant Fiorini, met the Colonel Commander who told him that he would soon send his adjutant, a Major, to make direct contact with me. And at about the 11:00, it was in fact I found a Captain, I do not remember the name, from which I learned the situation of his Regiment, at Dmitriewka, I communicated to him in my turn, and confirmed to me the general situation given to me first by my Division commander. At 10:00 I received the attached communication no. 5 from my General, and I had to move at 16:00. Until 12:00, I noticed on a ridge on my right, 3 to 4 km away, strong masses of Germanic cavalry coming down to the south converging on my own itinerary. From some prisoners, spontaneously presented, I had known in the meantime that their units were desperately trying to ferry the Bug to New Odessa, although German aviation hindered such operations by repeatedly destroying their many footpaths.

I was immediately told the exact picture of the new situation, which Mr. Giovanelli, beyond Wosnessensk, could not know or perceive, namely: if I stayed until 16:00 the Germans would be overwhelmed with their cavalry and with the wide margin of over four hours, and the Division would therefore no longer have arrived in time, absolutely, to pin the opponent. It was a question of military honor for me.

For 14 days we had been launched in a desperate race past the Dniester to the Bug in search of an enemy we had never been able to grasp. Therefore, let slip now after having contacted and dispelled it, the only chance to fight it after so much effort and anxiety, because the German units would have surely met him before us, if I had waited for the General until 16:00, was what, in my opinion, which also compromised the good name of the whole Expeditionary Corps.

I did not know against whom I was going to slam, it is true, and my strengths were not excessive; but this is part of the "something" of risk that every commander in war must be able to face serenely.

I therefore decided to take my own initiative right up to the crossroads immediately west of Korwalewka, at least at first, to put under control the bridge of Nuova Od and I participated in the General with the attached note n. 6. Immediately called the battalion commanders, the group and the autonomous units, I gave the orders of immediate departure, having however replaced the III battalion with the I, both because that had been busy the previous day, but above all because I wanted to put in avant-garde, the battalion that had a company rifle less, and therefore more streamlined, while I was holding the III battalion in the second group, stronger because organically complete. And so at about 13:30 I started the movement quickly, cutting through big advanced guard of German cavalry that already *two kilometers from me* had reached

the road from the west and proceeded to the Bug, while other major units pointed south-south-east, as an officer interviewed me.

At 15:00, after about 10 km, the Bersaglieri company commander said that he had struck, just north of Jasnaja Poljana, and after the village of Pokrowskoje, about 5 km from it, against strong opposition, a dead officer and send him a reinforcement company as soon as possible. At that time, I was headed by the commander of the group and with my Assistant Major in I, I ordered Lieutenant Rota, the commander of the point company, to immediately get out of the vehicles, to rearrange the unit, and carry on to the motorcyclist's queue as I called Major Moscardini, commander of the battalion, to give him the orders of the case in relation to the situation that in the meantime would have been determining. Meanwhile, on the column, which had taken a great depth due to the difficult turn of a watercourse, began to come up with enemy artillery, one of which struck full of accompanying battery wounding an officer, Sub. Lieutenant Zacchi, three militia troopers and killing a pack animal.

Reached, the 2<sup>nd</sup> company Rota, the motorcycle company, by the commander of this was moved to the left of the road to a field of maize, from which rifle and machine gun fire began. Thus, a fierce combat was ignited, during which they were unleashed, and a number of 81 mortars and more intense became artillery shooting.

Meanwhile, as Major Moscardini off loaded the entire battalion to take it to his hands and close on the enemy, I pointed to the commander of the group the area where the battery was being deployed, which, fortunately, I had unknowingly mashed on the head of the column and not still able to indicate nearby goals, because no communication had come from the advanced elements already in operation, with a happy start Major Rossi focused on the area of a trigonometric point from which, without seeing the flashes, they felt the artillery strikes in departure, and it certainly must have been an observatory.

The terrain was difficult, the situation of the column at that time of crisis was even more difficult, the crisis due to the enormous length of the units and the unloading from motor vehicles, and that it can never be avoided with the truck and the roads that we walk.

Combat, therefore, was ignited with the only advanced elements: the only important element, which we faced an enemy beaten and in phase of withdrawn and thus with the sole possibility of protective withdraw actions. My situation, therefore, at that moment was as follows:

- a motorcycle battalion, recon platoon, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rota company, reinforced by a machine gun platoon, a 45-mm mortar platoon and a 81-mm mortar platoon on the left of the road, in violent action against adversaries of major entities equipped with machine guns and mortars;
- the total bulk of the battalion on the move to tidy up after coming down from the vehicles;
- the rest of the column, very deep and beaten by artillery fire, still waiting for orders;
- the 9<sup>th</sup> battery, already advanced and deployed; the remaining artillery with their unit assignments ready to take action.

left, where the fire was. To Major Moscardini, after being pinned down, I ordered to go personally to the intense, and from where nothing was yet accurate to see what the situation was.

In the meantime I also ordered:

- to Major Minchiotti, to take the battalion at hand and move to the combat area, waiting for my orders;
- to Lieutenant Grassi, commanding accompanying 65/17 battery, to reach me soon with his pieces.

From Major Berlettano, meanwhile, the commander of the battalion who had been besieged, I was told that he was on the move to join the regiment, and close to it, but still a *kilometer* away.

After a few moments, I could see from the lines the Major Moscardini, supported by two men, because he was severely injured by an explosive bullet on his right arm, just below the humerus.

The line was about 300 meters away from me, and on the other hand I could not move around because I would not see anything anymore.

The Major, reached me, with a calm and stoicism admirable, told me the situation:

- the enemy, very strong, in his opinion two companies, was deployed in a very favorable area by a large haystack far away from our advanced elements about 150 meters on a bramble covered with wheat;
- the company's losses were already sensitive, and it was impossible to move from that area without huge sacrifices.

After that, I kept going for the first aid station, given I was bleeding.

In the battalion there was no Captain to replace him, and I took the lead. Called Lieutenant Genovesi, commanding the 4<sup>th</sup> company of the battalion and that was close to me, I ordered him to go with all his available men, including drivers, to reinforce the 2<sup>nd</sup> and take command of that block of units; to the 3<sup>rd</sup> company, Lieutenant Mori, to go forward on the right of the road, pointing on a ridge in front of about 700 - 800 meters, in order to try to fall on the opponent's left flank and thus grip him with the already fighting units; to unite all his men of the company battalion command, signalers, scriptures, etc., constituting with them a reinforcement unit. In the meantime, while I ordered the Major Minchiotti to tighten more and more closer with his battalion and with his battery of 75/27, I gave orders to the commander of the group, Major Rossi, to open the fire of the 9<sup>th</sup> in the area of the haystack, keeping in mind that the advanced elements were distant from it just 100 meters. The battery performed the task brilliantly, because the target was centered on the first salvo, without damage to the infantrymen.

With this good result, with the intensification of the shooting of our mortars and especially for the truly heroic, exciting advance of Lieutenant Morì with his glorious 3<sup>rd</sup> company, which impetuously got rid of every obstacle, the enemy began to yield. We have also seen that ahead of this company there were about ten machine-gun ambushes.

Meanwhile, however, the Lieutenant Genovesi, who had performed prodigies of valor, and the Lieutenant Rota, commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup>, was also wounded, so that on the left the situation could, without more leaders, become threatening, especially as there had been two or three attempts of encirclement by the adversary.

I then ordered Lieutenant Carbonati to take the left with all his men, the last of the battalion, that is, clerks and command staff, fifty, to protect his left flank, and take command of the units, and to the Major Minchiotti to surely reach me with his battalion, ready to be thrust right or left, depending on the opponent's further surrender.

The Mori company, meanwhile, had advanced more than 1 km, always overcoming everything he encountered, and resisting repeated armored car incursions, which suddenly appeared on the road.

I was about 19:00 now and had been fighting for several hours, when Captain Tognetti arrived with his company, reduced by the noted reconnaissance.

This new contribution that came to complete the I Battalion was held to me by the hand, at first, having determined a new fact. At the horizon, on the ridge that had already crossed over, I saw many men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> company reappear on foot.

Concerned, I sent Captain De Rensis, an interpreter to my command, on a motion, so that he could see and report to me. Shortly thereafter, the officer returned and wounded on one shoulder, while the motorcyclist, Sergeant Errico, had been injured much more seriously, both of them hit by a mortar bomb, and reported that with the company Mori had joined advanced elements of a German Infantry Regiment and who, fraternally, were fighting; then it was true that I had planned in the morning: if I did not move, we would no longer have the honor of arms.

The retreat had been necessary in order not to be hit by them who were in a somewhat out of position, moving from west to east.

They started shortly after the first shadows of the evening, while the enemy continued to retreat under our push. I therefore did not think it was the case to engage other elements, because I would only make a waste of human lives, and at 19:30 the combat would be extinguished, leaving only a few isolated rifle shots against the wounded and to collect fallen and serious injuries.

But most of all, the light visibility remained vivid.

All the many prisoners captured have stated, Annex no. 7, to belong to the 469<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment, which had been deployed against us, reinforced by many, mortars and three horse-drawn batteries, to protect the units passing the Bug.

*The struggle, therefore, took place with unequal forces and weapons: a battalion, a battery and a mortar 81 mm company, against a regiment, three batteries, and who knows how many mortars!*

The opponent fought hard and proved the losses.

But the "Pasubio" infantry had never taught to count on the adversary, faithful to the command it received: forward, at any cost, "In the name of Rome," a proud motto of my 80<sup>th</sup>.

If the tribute paid by the Regiment was serious, the 50% of the officers and 35% of the non-commissioned officers and troops of the engaged units, that of the enemy, according to the numerous prisoners, and we have seen ourselves, it was well in other proportions.

Otherwise, I reserve the right to submit reward proposals for those who are most valorous. Of all, however, emerges the figure of Sub Lieutenant Sansoni, already a volunteer of war in Spain, who, albeit weaker

in the physical condition, wanted to voluntarily follow the regiment at its departure from Mantua, leaving the Depot to which he was effective. He, commander of a machine gun platoon, as he could not act on the ground cover, carried with his weapons in line with the infantry, and with very fine shot and personal launch of hand bombs quietly reduced opponents' fire centers until, struck in the head of a gunshot wound up twenty feet away, heroically closed his noble existence. Exceptional example of exceptional glory and valor.

Regiment's moral, with this first episode of heroism, is higher than ever, and all the people of the "Roma" are delighted and proud to have had the honor and pride of being founded first, fraternally united to the motorcycle company, to the III Group of the Artillery and to the 47/32 Company, the traditions of glory of their Division and the Italian Expeditionary Corps in Russia.

In the evening, General Secretary sent me the attached appendix no. 8, and I communicated to him the defensive set up. In the night the enemy broke the contact again.

The losses found in the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> were as follows:

- Officers captured n. 2;
- Officers and Troops captured n. 13;
- Officers wounded n. 8;
- NCOs and Troops injured no. 74, of which 4, however, recovered dying.

To the heroic brothers we left in cemetery of Pokrowskoje and that with their glorious holocaust illuminate the harsh journey of duty, our devoted and unforgettable thought. Given the location where the action took place, it assumes, for historical journals, the name of Jasnaja Poljana's battle.

Colonel  
Commander of the Regiment  
*Epifanio Chiaramonti*

Appendix no. 1

#### FORMATION FOR THE AVANGUARD COLUMN

*Recon:*

- 1<sup>st</sup> company Bersaglieri motorcycle;
- a truck carried rifle platoon.

*Point of the avant-garde:*

- a truck carried rifle company;
- two platoons of the 47/32 A/T.

*Head of the avant-garde:*

- Command of the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Roma;
- III truck carried battalion of the same regiment;

regimental accompanying battery of 65 at 17:00 hours;  
a battery of the III Group of 75/27 of the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment.

*The bulk of the avant-garde:*

a platoon of the 141<sup>st</sup> Company 47/32 A/T;

one battery of the III Group of 75/27;

I Truck carried Battalion of the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry;

one battery of the III Group of 75/27;

II Truck carried Battalion of the 80<sup>th</sup> Regiment".

Note:

1<sup>st</sup> - Each battalion was reinforced by an 81 mm mortar company.

2<sup>nd</sup> - On the 12th of August, given the experience of the previous day, I had made a single variant of the column formation: to put the 75/27 battery at the head of the company, which being motorized is immediate while the 65/17 battery and the 47/32 platoon truck will take a long time before unloading men and materials and get into conditions to get into action.

Appendix no. 2

Transmitted at 16:00

August 11, 1941, XIX

Received 17:40

*From the Command of the "Pasubio" Division  
To the Command 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment*

Division Command, Battalion Berlettano and Battery are still at starting positions bogged down because of a violent storm *stop* It is not possible to continue and support it *stop* So do not go further for the moment *stop*

General Giovanelli

Appendix no. 3

11 August 1941 - 17:45 hours

*From the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment  
To General Giovanelli Vittorio*

Since your Lordship has told me to be mired at the starting point, I obviously can not rely on only the two battalions I have, with two batteries that have limited ammunition.

So I stop, finding myself too far away from you.

It is with great regret that I take that decision because the action was put together in order to capture a battery on horseback. But duty requires me not to commit recklessness..

I am looking for your orders.

Colonel *Chiaramonti*

Appendix no. 4  
August 12, 1941 - 06:30 hours

*To Commander 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry*

Situation:

22nd Division (XI Corps): southwest Moldawka points towards Wosnessenk.  
XXX Army Corps: advanced elements Waterloo points to the east in contact with the enemy.

LIV Corp's advanced elements at Sulz - enemy attacks from the north and south.  
Lindemann 15 km west of Nikolajew.

Hungarians on the left bank of the Bug looks south of Novaja – Odessa on the way to Nikolajew.

Division Command - Berlettano is still standing waiting to leave.

General *Giovanelli*

Appendix no. 5

N. 4788 of prot. Op.

P.M. 83/R. there on August 12, 1941

*To Colonel Chiaramonti Epifania*

Get ready to move today at 16:00 as soon as I get to you.

The General Commander  
Vittorio Giovanelli

Appendix no. 6  
August 12, 1941 - 11:50 hours

*From Command 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment  
To General Giovanelli Vittorio*

Given the situation tell me about our allies, given the elements of a German regiment from the west, probably those with whom I made contact last night almost reached me following my own itinerary,



I do not intend to climb over it and then go back on the march at the same time. Please urgently urge the army command of my presence and my movement to prevent us from being mistaken for Russians, as it was already happening this morning with those coming from the west.

Colonel *Chiaramonti*

Appendix no. 7

12 August 1941

*Commander of the 80th Infantry Regiment*

Head Quarters

The undersigned Sub. Leut. Pavoni Vittorio, Russian Interpreter, hereby declares:

a) From the interrogation of the prisoners captured in the fights of 11<sup>th</sup>, it appeared that in the front sector assigned to the Regiment, a battalion of the 469<sup>th</sup> Russian infantry regiment was strengthened, reinforced by a cavalry battery, the rearguard of a division retreating towards New Odessa;

b) From the interrogation of the captives captured in the fight backed by our regiment on the 12<sup>th</sup> near Jasnaja Poljana, it was established that all the prisoners in question belonged to the Russian 469<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment left as a rearguard of a division retreating to the south - East.

The regiment itself was reinforced by three batteries.

The same prisoners said that the enemy losses were significant in deaths and wounded especially as a result of our artillery and 81 mm mortar operations.

The Official Interpreter  
Sub. Leut. *Pavoni Vittorio*

Appendix no. 8

P.M. 83/R, August 1941, 19 hours

*Dear Chiaramonti*

It's okay as usual.

It's a bit late to engage in pm. Keep contact; to specify enemy positions and positions (as far as possible).

The advanced Bn. Berlettano nel vallone where Minchiotti had to be there, but not to commit him tonight.

Goodbye.

General Giovanelli

Document n. 28.

THE GENERAL COMMANDER OF THE III CORPS

Corps HQ August 21, 1941

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The III Corps armored has succeeded in recent days with harsh combat and defensive fights, to repel a numerically superior enemy, from a very extensive area to a southwest bridgehead of Dnjepropetrowsk.

Till now:

9,600 prisoners

98 tanks

108 cannons and anti-tank pieces

as well as six cannons

represent the superb booty of the last 3 days.

While the 60<sup>th</sup> Motorized Division first defeated the enemy beyond the Mokraja Ssura, and then defeated victoriously all the enemy attacks by armored forces, the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, coming from other tasks, advanced fast moving around the " wing of the 60<sup>th</sup> and in hard fights closed the enemy bridge head.

All enemy raids were quickly swept, everywhere the situation was quickly restored. Particularly distinguished on this occasion was the 627<sup>th</sup> battalion of the engineers of the Corps, who with no support of artillery and heavy weapons, it was able to alone, in offensive battles, conquer about 550 prisoners.

The artillery of the Corps and the anti-aircraft have also contributed to success, the latter particularly with its intervention in the ground battle. Air recon always made new key communications for further decisions.

The precondition for the rapid, advance, urgent need of the 13<sup>th</sup> Armored Division was created by the SS Wicking division and the Italian Pasubio division, who despite the unfavorable operating conditions of the command, and partly the unfavorable fuel situation, quickly overcame all the difficulties. These two divisions also contributed to the success of the Corps.

To all members of the III Corps and last but not least at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Connection Battalion and Director of the Corps Supplies section no. 403 who have supported in a decisive manner the Command of the Corps itself, I express my thanks and my acknowledgment.

And now to the annihilation of the last red soldier, on the right bank of the Dniepr!

*addresses:*

Divisions

Troops of the Army

Troops of the Corps

Troops of the Air Force

*von Maclecsen*

Cavalry General

Document n. 29.

THE GENERAL COMMANDER OF III CORPS.

September 9, 1941

*To the Commander of the C.S.I.R.*

*Exc. Giovanni Messe*

Mr General,

both for direct observation from the observatory and for the reports of the troops that made yesterday's attack on the bridgehead's enlargement, I know with great success that fought the mass artillery very kindly available to me. I would not miss the opportunity, and I am particularly pleased to announce the above.

I hope that these three glorious units will support my troops in the coming days who are struggling hard on the bridgehead. I would be very grateful if you would like to issue a special order to your artillery. I would in this case charge my artillery commander to contact the V/ Commander of artillery.

The tasks of this artillery will be on the front line a barrage of fire in front of the western side of the bridgehead, then the annihilation of enemy artillery.

With comradely greetings V/

*von Mackensen*  
Cavalry General

Document n. 30.

COMMAND  
OF THE ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY CORPS IN RUSSIA  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

*Secret!*

ORDER OF OPERATIONS No. 16

N. 5600/Op. of Prot.

Boshedarowka, September 16, 1941. XIX. 08:00 Hour

*Subject:* Advanced division "Pasubio" beyond Dnjepr.

Map: 1:100,000 - Sheets of: Kremenschug East (M. 36 XIV Ost - Kremenschug); West Satschepilowka (M. 36 XV West - Satschepilowka).

*To the Infantry Division "Pasubio"*

Katerinowka - 1 co. to ½ motorized

*To the Command 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division "P.A.D.A. "*

Mogila Osstraja - 1 co. to ½ mot.

*To the Vice Commander of the Celere Division*

Mogila Osstraja - 1 co. to ½ mot.

and, for knowledge:

*To the Command RH.G.*

Kriwoj Rog - 1 co. to ur. col.

*To the Command Infantry Division "Torino"*

Pokrowkoje – 1 co. to ½ mot.

*To the Artillery Command of C.S.I.R.*

Headquarters - 1 c. a hand

*To the Engineer Command of C.S.I.R.*

Headquarters - 1 c. a hand

*To the Services Office C.S.I.R.*

Headquarters - 1 c. a hand

1) - The 17<sup>th</sup> Army moves towards Poltawa gravitating with western forces\Worskia and advancing between Worskla and Oriol right column formed by an Army Corps (two divisions).

Behind the right wing will advance 13<sup>th</sup> Panzer division.

2) - "Pasubio" Division, road transported and reinforced by the motorcyclists co. and a squadron of "L" tanks will be employed over Dniepr's right side guard 17<sup>th</sup> Army on the Oriol,

3) - "Pasubio" Division therefore:

- it will be moving eastward to Derjewka Bridge as soon as it will be in the area of 370 vehicles of the XXIX Group that I put at its disposal (presumably the movement will start at 18.00, and the Officer will immediately be present at this Command for Orders);

- to carry all the unit and services (reduced pack animals) which will be able to be transported in relation to the number of available vehicles, providing, if the situation so permits, a subsequent carriage of the remaining items;

- leave the 100/17 group in position, which will follow after a short time, and a mortar battalion;

- collect deployed units as they will be replaced by

Regimental group Solinas, constructed as follows:

- "Novara" Lancer Regiment;

- On Bn. bersaglieri;

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Co. motorcyclist;

and reinforced by:

- a group of 100/17 of the "Pasubio" division (in 1<sup>st</sup> phase):

- a mortars Bn. of the "Pasubio" division;

- any different elements of that division left temporarily in reinforcement.

4) - Regimental group Solinas initiates replacement as soon as possible and in order to assume responsibility for the "Pasubio" sector, replaced by hours or day 18<sup>th</sup>.

Task: defense of the sector.

5) - At the end of the sector's responsibility, the "Pasubio" division will go to the tactical dependence of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army.

At the assumption of the sector's responsibility, the Solinas group will go to the direct dependencies of this Command.

- 6) – Assign to the Regimental group Solinas a A 310 radio station.
- 7) - Commander of the "Pasubio" division is present today at the 17<sup>th</sup> Army Command in Alexandrja.
- 8) - Services: separate orders.

General of the Army Corps  
Commander  
*Giovanni Messe*

Document n. 31.

COMMAND  
OF THE ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY CORPS IN RUSSIA  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

*Secret!*

ORDER OF OPERATIONS No. 21

Mogila Ssuriska, 1 October 1941 XIX . 24:00 Hours

**Subject:** Use of C.S.I.R. beyond Ssamara.

Map: 1: 300,000.

<i>To the Infantry Division Command at. "Pasubio"</i>	<i>by ½ motoc.</i>
<i>To the Infantry Division Command at. "Torino"</i>	<i>by ½ motoc.</i>
<i>To the Command 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division "P.A.D.A. "</i>	<i>by ½ motoc.</i>
<i>To the Artillery Command of C.S.I.R.</i>	<i>by hand</i>
<i>To the Engineer Command of C.S.I.R.</i>	<i>by hand</i>
<i>To the Aviation Command of C.S.I.R.</i>	<i>by ½ courier</i>
<i>To the Services Office C.S.I.R.</i>	<i>by ½ motoc.</i>
and, for knowledge:	
<i>To the Command Panzergruppe I</i>	

I - The Panzergruppe 1 to close on the Azow Sea as soon as possible, so that the Red Army is committed against the German 11th Army.

The XIV Corps now commands the south-south attack by moving to the line Dniepr- Pawlograd - Orechow, heading south of the Konskaja, between the Dniepr marshes and the Plawni and Orechow stations, to annihilate weak red divisions to the east of the Dnieper.

In the future it will proceed south or south - east.

Staggered back and left, advances the III Armored Corps, in charge of the flank guard.

II. - *Task of the C.S.I.R.*: Replace the III Armed Corps. as it advances, in the protection of the left flank of the Panzer troops on Woltscja, from Pawlograd onwards.

III. - Therefore:

1) *Celere Division*: it will move first:

- Dniepr passes at Dniepropetrowsk immediately. Agreements with the Commander 511<sup>th</sup> Germanic Engineers Regiment, as per telephone notice;
- concentrate on October 2 at Mogila Welikaja - Shiwotilowka - Alexandropoli
- Majdan, ready to move to Pawlograd.

2) *Pasubio Division*: immediately pick up the reinforcement elements in the current area, recognizing, as before, the itineraries adorned with Nowomoskowsk.

3) *Torino Division*: Now concentrate on the current reinforcement elements in the Kamenka area.

4) *Corps Troops and Services*: position, as soon as possible, as of previous order 6170 on September 30<sup>th</sup>.

5) *Artillery*: The Artillery Command assigns to the Celere Division:

- a group of 105/32;
- a battery of 75/46 A/A, in case it can be removed from the A/A of Dnipropetrovsk.

6) *Engineers*: as early as possible, arrange for the possible increase of ferries available to the Celere Division.

Provides links to the employee G.U..

7) *Aviation*: Reserve to orders.

8) *Services*: Separate orders.

9) *C.S.I.R Command Post*: in North Dnjepropetrowsk, starting from 12:00 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> October p.v.

General of the Army Corps  
Commander  
*Giovanni Messe*

Document n. 32.

COMMAND  
OF THE ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY CORPS IN RUSSIA  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

*Secret! Urgent!*

ORDER OF OPERATIONS No. 22

N. 6320/Op. of prot.

Manujlowka, October 4, 1941. XIX. 23:00 Hours

*Subject:* Advanced beyond the Nipro.

*Attachments:* n. 1

*Map:* 1:100,000.

*To the Infantry Division Command at. «Pasubio»*

*To the Infantry Division Command at. «Torino»*

*To the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division Command «P.A.D.A.»*

*To the Artillery Command C.S.I.R.*

*To the Engineer Command C.S.I.R.*

*To the Aviation Command C.S.I.R.*

*To the Services Office C.S.I.R.*

and, for knowledge:

*To the Command the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Group Kleist*

I - armored forces of the 1<sup>st</sup> Group Kleist have already reached the Orechow region and continue.

Situation as per Annex no. 1.

II. - The expeditionary Corps has the task of ensuring, along the Woltschja line from Pawlograd, the left flank of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Group from north to south depending on the evolution of the situation and with the progress made possible by the availability of the G. U ..

III. - I order:

- the Pasubio division, reinforced by the 1<sup>st</sup> Co. bers, motorcyclists and a squadron of "L" tanks, attest at the highway Dniepropetrowsk - Nowomoskowsk so as to secure the start of the move on the highway for the dawn of tomorrow's the 5<sup>th</sup> current.

Be sure to communicate the itinerary beyond Nowomoskowsk and further clarifications.

An officer of this Command will be in the morning at 5 o'clock at the confluence point of the highway from Kamenka on that of Dnjepropetrowsk - Nowomoskowsk.

- Celere Division depart the day after tomorrow, 6 current, with the elements on horseback reaching the area Losowatka - Nadeshdino. Motorized elements will close as soon as possible.

- Turin Division hastens to follow as soon as possible (in any way by day 7) other G.U. ..
  - *Armed Corps Troops*:
    - I make up with a CC.NN battalion, the 2nd anti-tank battalion, the second 75/27 group of 52<sup>nd</sup> Regt. artillery, elements of the engineers (by the Engineer Command, C.S.I.R.), a motorized unit of Corps at the orders of Major Diana.
- The Pasubio division will follow in the movement, engaging on the Dniepropetrowsk - Nowomoskowsk highway from 10:00 onward.  
It must reach the Ssinelnikowo area.
- The CC.NN Legion (less the part allocated to the motorized unit) will move as soon as the vehicles are available and following my order.

IV. - Artillery.

Assign:

- a group from the Torino division to the motorized unit of the Army Corp;
- 30<sup>th</sup> Regt. Art. of Corps reaches the Expeditionary Corps as soon as allowed by the Dniepr passes.

V. – Anti-aircraft defense:

- a 75/46 battery (already assigned) to the Pasubio division;
- a 75/46 battery deployed in defense of Dnjepropetrowsk;
- two 75/46 batteries remain to protect the bridge of Nowomoskowsk;
- two batteries of 20 mm. of the Corps. in air defense of the Command.

VI. - Security:

the vigilance measures taken have been intensified that, in the current situation, it is possible the enemy to infiltrate, particularly tanks.  
Special attention to mines.

VII. - Connections:

- by radio: like those already in place;
- by means of wire: each G.U. arranges to connect to the centers of wire connection of the Armored Group, already in operation. Axis of the Connections 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Group: Highway Nowornoskowsk – Ssinelnikowo - Saporoshje.

VIII. - Services: separate orders.

IX. – Command Post: Annowka area (South of Ssinelnikowo) from 12:00 on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

Tactical Command Elements will be in place from 18:00 on the 5<sup>th</sup>.

The General of the Corps  
Commander  
*Giovanni Messe*



Appendix to the Order of Operation n, 22

SITUATION AT THE DATE OF 3 OCTOBER 1941

1<sup>st</sup> - XIV Panzer Corps has reached the Orechow region, The III Panzer Corps beat the enemy that he attacked on its flank.

2<sup>nd</sup> - The Panzergruppe still advances to the south-east to wipe out considerable enemy forces standing in front of the Army.

3<sup>rd</sup> - XIV Corps is preparing to advance on the morning of October 4th from the region of Orechow or to Tokmak Station or in the direction of Alexejewka. The decision on this will be given by the contingent situation.

4<sup>th</sup> - The III Panzer Corps has the task of giving protection to the left flank of the Panzergruppe at Pawlograd.

5<sup>th</sup> - The 198<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division must occupy the sector at Pawlograd and give protection to the left side of the Panzergruppe.

6<sup>th</sup> - The 60<sup>th</sup> Motorized Division will move on October 4 for Nowomoskowsk up to Alexandropolj where it will be used according to the situation.

7<sup>th</sup> - C.S.I.R. keep itself ready to move with a division in the afternoon on October 4th.

In conclusion:

- Defensive flank is formed:

- up to Pawlograd included: by the III Corps;
- from Pawlograd to the south: by the C.S.I.R. ..

Document n. 33.

198<sup>th</sup> INFANTRY DIVISION

The commander

Command of the division, October 12, 1941

*To the Garelli Column*

and

*To the Artillery Regiment of Col. Mattiotti*

The Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army, Army General von Kleist, by means of radio broadcast at the 198<sup>th</sup> infantry division reinforced, his recognition.

I convey this high recognition to the valiant allied troops of the Italian Army, who during the combat were at my disposal, gratitude for their valuable contribution.

In three days of hard fighting, the Garelli column with the 63<sup>rd</sup> Legion "Tagliamento" under the command of Consul Nicchiarelli and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bersaglieri motorcyclists under the command of Captain Tanganelli - shoulder to shoulder with the troops of the 198<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division - broke the well-fortified and tenaciously defended bridgehead in front of Pawlograd, capturing Mishiritsch and Mawrina and overthrew the enemy beyond the Woltschja sector.

Batteries of the 30<sup>th</sup> artillery regimental group under the command of the Colonel Mattiotti has been very supportive of this action as much as the attack of the German infantry and with the aid of their excellent shot contributed to the victory.

I express to these Commanders and their valiant troops my full recognition and at the same time the thank-you-hearted thanks to the name of my division and formulate the best wishes for new military glory up to the common final victory.

*Roetting*

Lieutenant General and Commander of the Division

Document n. 34

Phonogram

Secret!

sinelnikowo, on October 12, 1941. XIX. 14:00 Hours

From the Command C.S.I.R.

*To the Celere Division Command «PADA. »*

*To the Inf. Division Command «Torino»*

*To the Inf. Division Command «Pasubio»*

*To the Artillery Command C.S.I.R.*

*To the Engineer Command C.S.I.R.*

*To the Garelli Tactical Group Command*

*To the Services Office C.S.I.R.*

*To the Aviation Command C.S.I.R.*

and, for knowledge:

*To the 1st Armored Army Command*

N. 6710/Op. stop - To confirm verbal orders already given stop Enemy retreats on all the front protected very weak rearguard stop C.S.I.R. must today with 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division ensure passes Iantschul river constituting two bridge heads between Turkenowka & Nowo Uspenowka and push day 13

bridge Boljschaj Janissol resulting in clear way, guaranteeing possession of *stop* Rimanenti G.U. will follow, staggered back and left *stop*. C.S.I.R. railway junction Stalino *stop* To accomplish these tasks 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division will move morning 12 current with regiments Savoia & Novara & regiment artillery on horseback *stop* will follow on foot the 3<sup>rd</sup> bersaglieri regiment less XVIII battalion that remains provisionally deployed on the Woltschja *stop* Reached division goals will stand hold orders *stop* Remaining divisions will reunite their own G.U. as soon as permitted by road conditions *stop* It supersedes on the constitution of a motorized grouping. Camicie Nere Legion reaches Ssinelnikowo *stop* Pasubio Division make known replacement as from my telephone orders *stop* Division collects blocks of battalions ready to move as soon as they are available even walking just the minimum baggage available *stop* Vehicles will follow as soon as possible *stop* Recon offensive outlets that will in any case be created when C.S.I.R. will advance even if division has not achieved the aforementioned movement conditions *stop* to the Torino Division Tichanowka concentration zones - Pissimennaja station - Martynoff *stop* Recon Offensive routes between Uljanowka and Bogodar to advance to the east *stop* Army Corps Reserve to Colonel Garelli orders constituted by 63<sup>rd</sup> Legion Camicie Nere, Command of anti-war battalion and a company of 47/32; first chemical battalion; a group of 105/32; a platoon picked up by morning tomorrow 13 Ssinelnikowo area - Lubianka *stop* Artillery two-point assign a group 105/32 to the Pasubio & to the group 105/32 and a group 75/27 of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Torino artillery to the division Celere *stop* A 75/46 battery to the Pasubio and Celere *stop* a group 75/46 for protection second echelon divisions and Army Corps Troops *stop* One battery twenty to the Celere division and one for protection of the second echelon divisions and Army Corps Troops *stop* Engineers: First bridges you will be focusing on the area Iwanowka (Panzerstrasse Ost - south Pissimennaja station) *stop* Engineers command assignments to the Army Corps Reserve a motorized artificers platoon *stop* Remaining artificers battalion at Ssinelnikowo *stop* Aviation: Limited tactical Exploration: Guliaj Pole - Andrejewka (50 km west of Stalin) - Grischino - Alexandrowka (80 km east - northeast of Pawlograd) - Losowaja - Peretschepino *stop* Recognition results as well as this Command will be communicated directly to the Eberth Group and 198<sup>th</sup> Division: Fighter: orders in turn *stop* Services: separate orders *stop*

General *Messe*

ORDER OF OPERATIONS No. 23

*Secret!*

13 October 1941. XIX. 22:15 Hours

From the Command C.S.I.R.

To the *Pasubio* Division Command

To the *Torino* Division Command

To the Celere Division Command

To the Artillery Command C.S.I.R.

To the Engineers Command C.S.I.R.

To the Aviation Command C.S.I.R.

To the Service Office

Phonogram

encrypted radio

encrypted radio

by hand

by hand

encrypted telegram

by hand

and, for knowledge:

To the Command the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army

To Colonel Chiusi

[through the

connection office

N. 6772/Op. *stop* - Operation order number 23 alt Enemy retreating on all fronts *stop* Orders for tomorrow fourteen *stop* Pasubio Division reinforces exploratory elements so that they can be pushed forward as feasible and painstakingly prepared for the entire division river crossing that must absolutely to come soon. Read more about this *stop* Torino Division attests at Woltschja and similarly prepares river passages signaling to this Command *stop* Detach, if possible, tomorrow's day, exploring elements over river in the direction of Bhf. Tschaplin *stop* Celere Division keeps its own elements in order to attest as soon as possible at line Zgl. Wassiljewka - Bol. Janissol taking over the bridge of. Zgl. Wassiljewka by surprise *stop* Gravitation forces to the left bearing in mind that initially just left side is reconed and then main axis advanced division will be Zgl. Wassiljewka - Kostantinopoli - Golubowka *stop* Location Bol. Janissol turns out to be an enemy. I insist on necessity maximum attention mined fields east side Woltschja *stop* Torino Division special attention is given to this Office's I for this morning's reporting as far as the town Wassiljkowka which is heavily mined *stop*

General *Messe*

Document n. 36.

ORDER OF OPERATIONS No. 26

Secret!

From Command C.S.I.R.

To the Infantry Division Command «Pasubio»	encrypted radio
To the Infantry Division Command «Torino»	encrypted radio
To the Celere Division Command «P.A.D.A.»	encrypted radio
To the Artillery Command C.S.I.R.	by hand
To the Genio Command C.S.I.R.	by hand
To the Aviation Command C.S.I.R.	encrypted telegram.
To Services Office C.S.I.R.	by hand

and, for knowledge:

Command 1 <sup>st</sup> Armored Army	tram. Off. Con. germ.
To Colonel Chiusi	tram. Off. Con. germ.

N. 6932/Op. *stop* - Sixteen October hours 22 *stop* Order no. 26 *stop* Situation *stop* Seventeenth army at Nikolajewka - Alexandrowka - Katerinowka at north-east Pawlograd *stop* Forty-ninth Corps with elements advanced line Ssuchije Ialy bulk to Bogojawlenskoje *stop* enemy news *stop* An infantry regiment with artillery behind river Ssuchije Ialy *stop* Resistance Annowka Jelissawetowka already overtaken *stop* Orders for tomorrow seventeen *stop* Pasubio Division: attest at Nikolajewka and if possible reach Nowo Wessiolaja *stop* Detach Armor Grouping Towards Nowo Pawlowka *stop* Guard his left flank to the full depth of the column *stop* Torino Division: beginning Gaitschur passage to move between Bogodar - Mogila Sadoroshnoja and Orestopoli *stop* Pending continued eastward recon passes of Woltschja & Wonaona *stop* Celere Division: reach Konstantina - Uspenowka line and start strong exploration detachment towards Hf line. Baryschoff - Makssimilianowka excluded *stop*

General Messe

ORDER OF OPERATIONS No 38

*Secret!*

From the Command C.S.I.R.

To the Command <i>Pasubio</i> Division	encrypted radio
To the Command <i>Torino</i> Division	encrypted radio
To the Command 3 <sup>rd</sup> Celere Division	encrypted radio

and, for knowledge:

To the Artillery Command	by hand
To the Engineer Command	by hand
To the Aviation Command	trans. Off. attaché
To the Services Office	by hand

N. 8052/Op. *stop* - Fourteenth of November hours 11 *stop* Order operation number thirty-eight *stop* Current positions are to be maintained tactically improved and consolidated *stop* In the first line Pasubio division from the current left-wing position to Mogila Pawloskaja included with defensive flank defensive north-northwest to the Torino Division from Mogila Pawloskaja excluded to Kol. Dawido Orlowka included *stop* Contact line between Pasubio and Torino two points Mogila Pawloskaja - impacts Balka Rassochowata to the Pasubio *stop* Contact lines with unchanged German units *stop* Each division resumes its own dependencies Elements to assignment reinforced as by order number 8033 this Command and 105 Group already assigned to the Pasubio with radio 7615 is in march to reach G.U. halt Celere division in second division in Batmanka - Korssunj station area provided at an immediate reorganization of Bersaglieri and regiment motorcyclists companies, for tasks that I reserve to specify *stop* Posts Split divisions two points Pasubio Gorlowka - Turin Rykowo - Celere Korssunj *stop* The reordering of which this order is an estimate point having the maximum character urgency & should not miss a minute *stop* General Giovanelli in charge regular and consequent coordinate movements of the units *stop* keep me informed *stop* until finalizing reorganization it will continue to hold responsibility two sectors Pasubio & Celere *stop*

General *Messe*

Document n. 38.

COMMAND  
OF THE ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY CORPS IN RUSSIA  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

*Secret!*

P.M. 88/R, 24 November 1941. XX

N. 8343 of prot.

*Subject:* Order of the day 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army.

*To the Command «Pasubio» Inf. Division*

*To the Command «Torino» Inf. Division*

*To the Command 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division «P.A.D.A.»*

and, for knowledge:

*To the Artillery Command C.S.I.R.*

*To the Engineer Command C.S.I.R.*

At their Headquarters

I am proud to forward the following agenda of yesterday received from Command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army with which it is once again recognized and highly appreciated the contribution of C.S.I.R. to the ongoing operations:

"Although the battle is still underway, I feel the need to express to my troops my thanks and my full gratitude, namely to the III Corp. for the courageous episode and the taking of Rostow, to the XIV Corps and XLIX Corps for the valiant defense against the strongest enemy attacks and for the well-executed, difficult to pull the front, to the Italian Expeditionary Corps for the left-wing of the XLIX Corps.

"In full confidence in our superiority, we will end the winter battle started.

*von Kleist"*

The General of the Corps  
Commander  
Giovanni Messe

ORDER OF OPERATIONS No. 41

*Secret.*

From the Command C.S.I.R.

<i>To the Pasubio Division Command</i>	<i>a ½ mot.</i>
<i>To the Torino Division Command</i>	<i>a ½ mot.</i>
<i>To the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division Command</i>	<i>a ½ mot.</i>
<i>To the Artillery Command C.S.I.R.</i>	<i>by hand</i>
<i>To the Engineer Command C.S.I.R.</i>	<i>by hand</i>
<i>To the Aviation Command C.S.I.R.</i>	<i>trans. Off. Links</i>
<i>To the Service Office</i>	<i>by hand</i>

and, for knowledge:

<i>To the 17<sup>th</sup> German Army command</i>	[ <i>trans. Off. Links</i>
<i>To the Command the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army</i>	

N. 8520/Op. alt - Three December at 19 hours *stop* Operation Order Number Forty-one *stop* Day x 17<sup>th</sup> Army will attack the front of Karlowka - Kaganowitscha to bring his right wing to Bhf. Debalzewo *stop* It's likely that same day it reaches Luganskoje - Jekaterinowka & day x plus one action continues on target Bhf. Debalzewo *stop* C.S.I.R. compete x Day Attack with fire action and pinning by division Pasubio (separate orders) and day x plus one as follows until Torino Division attacks with direction Rykowo - Mogila Chazepetowka & with target Chazepetowka station from which will find a strong connecting element with 17<sup>th</sup> Army at Mogila Businowataja *stop* Current deployment is replaced by two external defensive flanks entrusted to two reserve battalions deployed in the departure margins east and west Rykowo *stop* Division has full availability all artillery deployed in divisional sector *stop* Attack will be facilitated by action a battalion division Pasubio that after having carried out mobile surveillance between line contact & Rykowo will move hour sixteen for Ssofjewka where it will remain at the dependency of the Torino division *stop* Attack ready to start from hour seven on my order *stop* Pasubio Division is able to start on my order action mopping-up direction that I reserve to indicate & engagement opponent ready to take advantage of a minimum favorable decision for exploit in its sector because of lateral actions *stop* Celere Division intensifies exploration across its front and in particular with Savoy squadron from Hf. Baschkowskij area & with black shirts battalion from the area Kol. Dawida Orlowka *stop* Aviation performs protection column Torino attack and hit opponents movements on the sectors Pasubio - Torino - Celere *stop* I require maximum number of airplanes in flight *stop* Reserve specify date x *stop* Ensure quoting protocol *stop*

General Messe



Document n. 40.

COMMAND  
OF THE ITALIAN EXPITIONARY CORPS IN RUSSIA  
OFFICE OPERATIONS

*Secret.*

N. 8567/Op. of prot.

P.M. 88/R, 4 December 1941. XX

*Subject:* Guidelines for ongoing action.

To the Commander the Infantry Division "Pasubio"  
To the Commander the Infantry Division "*Torino*"  
To the Commander the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division" P.AD.A."

Their Headquarters

1. - These guidelines are drafted purely for guidance and close cooperation, in order to draw a synthetic picture of the times in which current action could develop.

2. - Purpose of the offensive: to eliminate the opposing forces facing us, to advance the 1<sup>st</sup> line of the Torino division on the line "Z" (ridge between Balka Dolshil and Balka Sorrotschja) to the north with it deployment of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army in the Debalzewo area, and south with the current one of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division.

*phases:*

*Day 5:*

- Attack of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army at the positions of Luganskoje - Troizkoje;
- assistance of the Pasubio division with action of fire and engagement.

*Day 6:*

- offensive prosecution 17th Army on the Debalzewo railway hub;
- Torino Division Attack on Bhf. Chazepetowka;
- mobile surveillance a Bn. Pasubio division that, at 16:00 Hours, will move to Ssofjewka to the Torino division with the Defensive flank work;
- exploration intensification by the Celere division from Hf. Baschkowshij & from Kol. Dawida Orlowka.

On the evening of day 6 the situation of the Torino division would be seen as follows:

- a block of 3 - 4 battalions and divisional motorized groups in Chazepetowka area;
- a block of 2 - 3 battalions with the horse groups in the Nechotimowka area;
- group 105 in current deployment zone;
- a Bn. 79<sup>th</sup> in the Ssofjewka area, defensive west-northwest;

- a group of Savoia dismounted, margins east Rvkowo. East-south-east defensive flank.

*Day 7:*

The action would be developed as follows:

- *Torino Division*, with interdependent action and closely linked by the two battalion blocks examined, should on the "Z" line in the directions:

a) North block: astride the railway Swk. Ssawiolewka - hill 277- ;

b) south block: Nechotimowka - Ssofjewka Rojewka – Swk. Ssawiolewka.

- *Pasubio Division*: aiming at the village of Carlo Marx and afterwards, railroads and further east Kalininsk to carry out the shock action.

- *Celere Division*: as soon as possible it would connect with the *Torino* division on the "Z" line, in the Ploskij area.

This orientation framework clearly overlooks the unforeseen circumstances of combat that can vary the mode of action and to which only through the direct feeling of the ground, the situation and the enemy will do facing the Division Commander.

I repeat that the premise of the action of C.S.I.R. is naturally in the successful offense by the 17<sup>th</sup> Army.

The General of the Corps  
Commander  
Giovanni Messe

Document n. 41.

#### COMMAND ORDER GERMAN 1<sup>st</sup> ARMY

*From the Command the German 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army  
To the Command C.S.I.R.*

1<sup>st</sup> Panzerarmee on December 17 hours 17.55 transmits the following telex:

"Order of Panzerarmee nr. 57.

1) The task of the Panzerarmee and the assignments of the Corps remain the same. Especially the Italian Expeditionary Corps keeps the task of shortening the front both further eastward and make close contact with the southern wing of the IV Corps in the Bhf. Debalzewo area. Its intentions must be communicated.

2) It must be prevented by the interdiction fire that the enemy does close to their trenches location. Ammunition consumption, especially by artillery, must be limited.

3) Shifts:

a) The engineer battalion 666 and the command of Inf. Regt. 318 and cyclists units of the Regt. must be set to IL Corps at Alexewo- Orlowo as soon as the road situation permits and after the agreement between the IL and the XIV Corps. The start must be communicated from part of the XIV Corps.

b) The Feldgendarmerie 685 company still employed at III Corps should be set up as soon as possible at Mariupol, available for the O.Qu. The Feldgendarmerie 682 Company passing to the dependency of the IL Corps must also be driven there as soon as the road conditions permit. The launch must be communicated by the III Corps. Moving the battalion of guard cyclists 45 and the Feldgendarmerie 692 will be ordered separately”.

Gen. von Kleist

Document n. 42.

COMMAND  
OF THE ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY CORPS IN RUSSIA  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

N. 9036/Op. of prot.

P.M. 88/R, 24 December 1941. XX

*Subject:* Operational guidelines.

*To the Infantry Division Command at. “Pasubio”*

*To the Infantry Division Command at. “Torino”*

The planned enemy attack against the *Celere* front – 198<sup>th</sup> Germanic Division does not exclude the possibility that it also extends in correspondence with the *Torino* and *Pasubio* sectors, perhaps with the simple purpose of concomitant action or to give security and breath to the exposed side of the main action.

The *Pasubio* and *Torino* Divisions must be prepared to cut off any attempt at this point in the first place; then, and on my order, to act offensively to the east in order to ease the pressure against the *Celere*.

During the development of this action and as a guarantee of the same, the battalions of the first echelon today lined up on the resistance line must, at first, remain on site; likewise the mass of the artillery which will however participate, with successive gradual modifications to the deployment, to the preparation and support of the offensive action.

Therefore, orient yourself:

- the establishment of two attack columns, one per division, the force of three battalions and an *assigned* artillery group; possible the aid

of four tanks "L" to the column "Pasubio" and of a unit of German tanks to the "*Torino*" column;

- the use of said columns respectively in direction:

a) *for the Pasubio Div.*: from Ilynkaja, descending along the buttress between Balka Dolshik and upper Bulawin;

b) *for the Torino Div.*: of Ploskij and Olichowatka maneuvering on the road axis Rykowo - Timofejewskij.

The Commander Army Corps

General

*Giovanni Messe*

Document n. 43.

EXCERPTS FROM THE CAVALLERO DIARY (13 - 26 July 1941)

13/7/1941:

9:45 am. Telephone to Exc. [Excellency] Galbiati. Subject: we are studying the formation of another unit for the east. Of course it will have his CC.NN. this time it should be the Galbiati regiment (\*) (as the Duce mentioned). Exc. Galbiati ensures that he will motorize it.

11:10 Hours. I receive the T.C. [Lt. Col.] Fornara. Topics:

- .....

- C.A. for possible dispatch to the east: Grenadiers and Livorno.

16/7/1941:

19:15 hours. I receive Exc. Galbiati and Exc. Roatta. Topic: CC.NN. Battalion for the second C.A. east (4 - 3 heavy weapons). My criterion. Accurate selection. You have to march with high and explained flags.

17/7/1941:

7:20 pm. Telephone to the Exc. Scuero.

I summoned Col. Girola (\*\*) to clearly know what the production situation is. Army can count on 2,000 a month. Reserve to get to 14,000 that no need. Wanting to constitute the second C.A. we have nothing for the east.... We need 2,000 for Messe n. 2 ... Increase repairs is difficult because there are holidays. Please see if it is appropriate to abolish them.

---

(\*) It was a "grouping of battalions" of black shirts, not of a regiment, a unit that did not exist in the M.V.S.N.. The grouping consisted of the battalions VIII (of Varese), XVI (of Como) and XXIX (of Arona).

(\*\*) Colonel Enrico Guido Girola was the Head of the Automotive Technical Service.

*19:25 Hours.* Telephone to Exc. Favagrossa (\*).

We said to have 2,000 vehicles for the Army but to meet the needs of Libya, production is absorbed for 3 months.

However, it is necessary to make a new C.A. to the east (4000 vehicles). We can have something from abroad (4 - 500) and from the Motherland as well as from the D.L.C.A.T. (\*\*) instead giving extensions (\*\*\*). But it always takes 3,000. You can cope with repairs by blocking the first 3,000 that will be ready in August. Scuero agrees, but the holidays in August must be abolished. So Col. Girola will send the list of establishments that do not leave.

*19:40 Hours.* Duce approves what has been agreed with Col. Girola for motor vehicles.

23/7/1941:

*9:45 am.* Telephone to the Exc. Roatta.

The CA. can go with common units by motorizing only the services and the infantry (\*\*\*\*).

*9:50 am.* I receive the T.C. Fornara. *Topics:*

- Large Units to be sent to Russia following the C.A. motorized.

They will be common with services and motorized artillery.

- .....

*18:30 Hours.* I receive Exc. Roatta. *Topics:*

- .....

- Trucks. Average production on which you can actually take into account (1,175).

Income from Germany.

Conclusion: the other troops destined in the East will have only the artillery and services of motorized vehicles.

Exc. Roatta reminds me that there are few motorized artillery. There is instead good availability of 105/28 and 149/13 (\*\*\*\*\*).

24/7/1941:

*09:00 Hours.* I receive Exc. Roatta. *Topics:*

- Divisions for the second expeditionary body for Russia.

*17:45 Hours.* Telephone to the Exc. Roatta. *Topics:*

- For the use of Grenadiers in the East it is advisable to notify the Prince of Piedmont (\*\*\*\*\*).

---

(\*) The General of C.A. Carlo Favagrossa was the Undersecretary of State for War Manufacturing.

(\*\*) This is the Militia for Territorial Anti-aircraft Defense, made up of volunteers of old or very young classes, to which the task was entrusted institutionally.

(\*\*\*) The baggage wagons supplied to the cavalry units were so commonly called.

(\*\*\*\*) In the original text is written "infantry", but this is obviously an oversight, as the text of the interview immediately following (9.50 am) confirms.

(\*\*\*\*\*) Even the batteries armed with these guns were motorized, like all army artillery.

(\*\*\*\*\*) He was the Inspector of the Infantry Arm.

26/7/1941:

09:00 Hours. I receive the Gen. von Rintelen. Topics:

- .....

- Second C.A. for the east. The Duce has not decided yet. But we are already preparing it, for now with two divisions, with a CC.NN. legion and special weapons of the Army. Calculation that by August it will be ready.

There are no vehicles so the infantry will be on foot but the services and artillery will be motorized (Granatieri and Livorno). We will soon send the vehicles that are missing for one of the divisions already started.

- .....

Document n. 44

THE DUCE OF FASCISM  
HEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT

*Secret.*

24 July 1941

#### MEMO ON THE POLITICAL - MILITARY SITUATION

##### 1.

At the present time - summer of 1941 - Italy has two fronts in place and two potential fronts.

The first front in action is the Cyrenaica one. It is a static front, in which we can not take the initiative: *a)* because Tobruck resists; *b)* because our forces are insufficient; *c)* because the enemy forces are progressively increasing.

Only a new political situation and precisely a sharp correction in Turkey's attitude or other unpredictable events can allow me to take the initiative. The forces that I consider indispensable for the defensive and the eventual offensive are: 2 Italian motorized divisions, 6 of normal divisions, 2 German divisions; total 10. For this tranquility - relatively - you need a mass of Italian-German aircraft of not less than 500.

I do not consider the current commander of the Air Force up to his tasks.

##### 2.

Another front in progress is the Eastern - Russian one. Given how much other minor states of our side have done, we need to prepare a second C.d'A. motorized more or less depending on the possibilities - in addition to the Galbiati Regt.. We can not be less present than Slovakia and we must repay the Allies.

*Potential fronts*

The ambiguous hostile attitude of France already noted in Berlin requires the necessary measures to face every eventuality. The French front has three sectors: Alpine, Corsican, Tunisian. I consider it necessary for the alpine front: 1 armored division, 1 motorized, 4 of alpine, 4 of normal infantry.

For Corsica 3 normal divisions.

For Tunisia 3 normal and motorized divisions.

3.

The fluidity of the Croatian situation requires maximum vigilance. To be ready for all the needs on the sector that - roughly - from Sava to Cattaro, no less than 10 divisions of which at least 2 armored and 2 motorized ones are needed.

4.

One last potential front may be that of our metropolitan islands; 4 divisions are needed for Sicily and 3 for Sardinia.

Taking into account the divisions that guard Albania and Greece, it appears that there is no mass of maneuver available in the Po valley.

I consider it necessary to set up this mass of at least 20 divisions.

In the spring of '42 the army must have no less than 80 divisions.

*Mussolini*

Document n. 45.

EXCERPTS FROM THE CAVALLERO DIARY

(1 - 31 August)

1/8/1941:

9.45 am. Telephone to Exc. Galbiati. Topic:

- Preparation of the Militia for the new C.A. for the east. Exc. Roatta announces that the CC.NN. would be included in the Livorno that is being prepared. Exc. Galbiati says that there is also that of the Grenadiers (\*). In my turn I say that we must take a legion, the best, keeping in mind that it will not be motorized. It will go to C.A. ..

---

(\*) The Legion CC NN formed by the LXXI battalion (of Faenza) and the LXXXI (of Ravenna) was included in the Livorno Division, with the 55<sup>th</sup> Friulian Alpine Legion of Gemona consisting of LV battalion, from Gemona, and LXXX, from Parma, and from the 182<sup>nd</sup> machine gun company, from Forlì.

9:50 am. Phone to the Gen. Rossi of the G.S. Subject:

- CC.NN. for new Corps east. I am not of the opinion to leave their legions to the two divisions, but to do as it was for the first Corps sent, that is a single legion and pass it to the Corps. Galbiati agrees and proposes only the Livorno, well selected and ordered. Or you can make a group of legions to Corps.

9:55 am. Telephone to the Exc. Galbiati informing him that sending a legion and not the other causes discontent and that the legions are very attached to their divisions. In my turn, I have said that these divisional legions are armed as assault troops and therefore inadequate for a war of this kind. Furthermore the Corps has no maneuvering elements. So I propose a well armed and well equipped group of legions. Direct agreements between Galbiati and Rossi.

18:10 hours. I receive Gen. von Rintelen. Topics:

- Situation in Russia. Significant progress to the south. Or it is about to be taken (\*).

- According to the Corps for Russia. It will take the whole month of August to complete it.

- .....

- .....

3/8/1941:

19:30 hours. Phone to the Gen. Rossi of the G.S. Topics:

Gen. Rossi then speaks to me of the 2nd Corps for the East, I affirm the principle that regardless of the consideration that the Corps leaves or not, must have the mass of maneuver and I say to make contact with Exc. Galbiati for the CC.NN ..

- .....

- .....

5/8/1941:

Hours 11:15. I receive the Exc. Galbiati. Subject: Project about CC.NN. Legions for the second Corps for the east. It is of the opinion to make it a regimental grouping. Telephone to the Gen. Rossi of the G.S. to make direct agreements with Exc. Galbiati.

12/8/1941:

9.30 am. I receive Exc. Scuero.

- .....

- "Livorno" Division has all the vehicles.

- "Piave" and "Littorio" divisions are almost ready. Troops march on foot with cartridges, spare food, and a shoulder blanket.

- .....

---

(\*) Odessa encircled on the 7th - 8th of August by eighteen divisions between Germans and Romanian was entirely conquered on October 17th 1941,



General Staff for the new command in Russia. Commander. We must talk about it to his Majesty the King Emperor. Talk about it only in an extremely informal way to the Gen. Sartoris (\*).

13/8/1941:

*11:15 hours.* I receive the Exc. Clerici (\*\*) and the Gen. Fassi (\*\*\*). Topics:

- Commander for the High Command which will be established in Russia upon the arrival of the second Corps.

14/8/1941:

*Hours 12:45.* I receive and confer with the Gen. Marras. Topics:

- New Corps for the East and its constitution with particular regard to the CC.NN

..

- Possibility by walking on foot with lightened backpacks.

*Hours 12:50.* Telephone to Exc. Scuero. Topic:

- Winter clothing also for the second Corps for Russia.

31/8/1941:

*20:10 hours.* Interview with Exc. Roatta. Topics:

- Second Corps for Russia.
- Operations in Russia; winter front. Projects to arrive at the Caucasus.

---

(\*) The General of Division Francesco Sartoris was in charge of the Inspectorate of the Infantry Arm.

(\*\*) The General of Army Corp (reserve) Ambrogio Clerici, Senator of the Kingdom, former Undersecretary of State for the War, had been called to serve as a member of the International Commission for prisoners of war.

(\*\*\*) Brigadier General Carlo Fassi was available to the Supreme Command.

LETTER OF MARSHAL KEITEL

delivered on August 2, 1941 to General Cavallero

Excellence,

It is right for me to provide you with a new summary of the situation according to my current judgment.

Despite the tenacious resistance and the numerous counterattacks of the enemy, the operations to the east take place in accordance with the established plan.

With regard to the Southern Army Group, well-founded reasons allow us to predict the annihilation of important opposing forces already on the right bank of the Dnieper. We will do our best to ensure that the Italian Expeditionary Corps, which is now moving to Hungary and is already moving forward, can still participate in these operations. We will take care that the Italian Corps is used compactly. However, it is not excluded that situations may arise in which it would be contrary to the sense of responsibility to renounce the use of one or two divisions already available simply because the two other divisions, or the third, were not yet in place. Similarly, at the time, the Germanic Corps in Africa immediately launched even small units into combat after their landing.

The Fuhrer took note of the magnanimous offer of the Duce to grant, in case of need, a second Italian Corps for the East front, and thanks.

The Army Group of the Center has shattered, with its rapid formations, important opposing forces in the area to the north - west of Smolensk splitting them into small groups: it has also rejected in the bloody combats concomitant diversions of the Reds to the East and Southeast.

The victorious conclusion of the battle at the center of the eastern front will provide the basis for future operations.

After the victorious breakthrough that led to its rapid formations beyond the Luga, the Northern Army Group awaits the arrival of the infantry divisions that will allow to complete attacks with the encirclement of Leningrad.

The British have so far failed to take advantage of the pinning down of the bulk of the Germanic army and the Germanic air force on the eastern front. Even in the future they will dare to attempt to disembark in the occupied western territories; nor do I believe that they will succeed in establishing themselves firmly in the Iberian Peninsula.

It is, however, certain that the British have recognized the greatest danger threatening their positions in the Middle East at the end of the campaign to the East. If they operate honestly (as we must assume) they will be led to try again, in the next few months, the attack against Cyrenaica in the dual purpose of taking possession of Italian North Africa and, consequently, influencing the behavior of the French in North-West Africa.

It is therefore particularly comforting that the great British convoy that recently carried reinforcements to the East, following the Sicilian Channel, was so effectively hit by Italian attacks. Also for

the audacious and victorious action against Malta I must express, my Excellency, my congratulations.

It is not timely to establish, before the Russian campaign is over, the common war plan of the Axis powers against the British positions in the Mediterranean.

As for North Africa, here is my concept:

1) Our efforts must be directed to the taking of Tobruk and the consequent annihilation of the local English forces in order to free and then be able to use the units currently engaged in the encirclement at the Egyptian border.

2) The achievement of this goal, however, is hampered by the enormous difficulties of supplies by sea. The loss of heavy artillery and other units destined to attack Tobruk, following the recent sinking, is therefore particularly regrettable because it is not readily repairable.

3) Should the British attack with preponderant forces before the taking of Tobruk, it will be necessary, in extreme cases, to withdraw the forces of the Sollum and Tobruk fronts towards the West: a preferable procedure in any case to a defeat at the Egyptian border.

4) The recognition of this eventuality requires that everything possible be done to at least set up backward positions, running approximately from Ain el Gazala in the South - West direction, protected on the flanks, from the area of El Mechili, through offensive actions conducted by mobile formations. So much the better if these positions will not be used.

5) Moving from these concepts to the preparation of the subsequent jump against the Suez Canal, a command of armored groups was planned to be employed by General Rommel who, in turn, is submitted to your commander, General Bastico.

As I hear from General von Rintelen you agree that the front of Tobruk remains, at first, the dependence of General Rommel. Given the intimate connection of the Sollum trunk with that of Tobruk, I think this is the best solution.

However, if particular reasons were to require later that the Tobruk front would become the immediate dependence of the Italian Supreme Command, the Rommel armored group should at least be able, as well as the African Expeditionary Corps as a mobile reserve, to also have an Italian Corps (Sollum); possibly also of further Italian rapid formation.

6) Safety and improvement of maritime transport retain their decisive importance. To this object it should be kept in mind that we will continue to rely mainly on the Italian ports of Tripoli and Benghazi.

As soon as the operations in the East have reached a temporary conclusion, I will greatly appreciate a meeting with you to set the plan for further operations.

This plan will not then be dictated by the desire to rest on our laurels, but rather by that of using the inclusion of Russia as a basis for large-scale operations in the Middle East, which will decisively improve Italy's strategic situation.

With particular gratitude, I accepted the decision of the Duce to include in the Italian Command the commands of the Germanic connections to arrive at a closer collaboration in Rome.

I beg you also in the future of the general of division von Rintelen for the ordinary exchange of views between you and the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces dependent on me.

Your wish again transmitted by General von Rimelen to grant the construction of the III or IV tanks at Italian factories, is currently under consideration: it will be, as far as possible, satisfied.

With greeting of comrade I remain

Your devotee

*Keitel*

Document n. 47.

SUPREME COMMAND  
August 25, 1941 (morning)  
MINUTES OF THE TALKING BETWEEN THE GENERAL CAVALLERO  
AND THE MARSHAL KEITEL

*Marshal Keitel.*

First of all, it is important to explain that the difficult logistics situation in which the Italian Expeditionary Corps came to be in Russia was a consequence of the rapid movement of the front line. Now, though, the crisis is overcome.

He then speaks of the situation of the trucks that he considers serious considering the immensity of the Russian front, and the destructions made by the retired adversary on the routes of highways and railway communications. Many times only airplanes have been able to overcome supply crises.

The deficiency, then, concerns not only the trucks, but also the tires that can not be supplied in sufficient numbers to all the trucks produced. The situation of the rubber has also worsened after the war with Russia which has blocked the supply route from the Far East through Russia itself and obliges to resort to the very long and dangerous sea route. Already two of the three ships loaded with tires coming from the Far East were torpedoed (2,400 tons on about 3,600). A bit of rubber has been captured at Nicolajew, but it is a small matter, fuel consumption is also formidable. For lack of wagons - tanker came to suffer also the supply of fuels to Italy.

Regarding the sending of a second Italian army corps to the Russian front, we sincerely thank the German side. However, it must be borne in mind that the German command could not give any help in terms of vehicles. There is already so much scarcity that Marshal Brauchitsch has asked and the Führer has agreed, albeit reluctantly, to direct the July motor vehicle production to the front.

Nor would it be prudent to use for this second Italian corps the vehicles destined for Libya. The more we start towards the winter that can be borne by the Italians much less easily than the Germans can bear the heat in Libya. We have decided to use the Italian corps in the south because the climate is more favorable.

In conclusion it would be very welcome that the Italian command, before deciding to send a second army corps to Russia, would evaluate this aspect of the problem (vehicles).

*Excellence Cavallero.*

It is very clear. We are not in a position to give our second corps as many vehicles (4,600) as we have given to the first one.

This second corps is of normal constitution and has only motorized services. I will therefore report to the Duce on this subject. In any case, I inform you that the second army corps, if it were to be sent, would be ready to leave as early as the beginning of September.

Document n. 48.

EXCERPTS FROM THE CAVALLERO DIARY  
(September 5 - October 31, 1941)

5 /9/1941:

9.15 am. Telephone to the Exc. Scuero. Topics:

- New troops for Russia and their tasks. Inappropriateness to send the Grenadiers division in view of these tasks.
- Winter clothing.

11/9/1941:

7.30 pm I receive the Gen. von Rintelen. Topics:

- .....
- .....

Second corps for Russia. Difficulty for vehicles and current use of G.U. that were predestined for the defense of the peninsula.

- .....

22/10/1941:

10:25 Hours. I go to confer with Exc. Ciano. Various topics including G.U. for Russia.

11:00 Hours I call Lt. Colonel Fornara (head of the order office).

Topics:

- New units for Germany for spring. It had been tact design for a maximum of 12 provided that there was still situation on all other fronts. It would take 7,000 vehicles to upgrade the army, of which 3,000 were requisitioned, 1,100 by the Germans, 600 recovered by the other armed forces, 600 recovered from Libya production (because they were light).

Until spring, production is mortgaged for Libya. So it is not possible to give the vehicles to the units for Russia. Anti-tank weapons, machine guns and submachine guns are also missing. In terms of the situation, 6 divisions could be made as much as possible, reducing troops to the western border and the central reserve (assuming that there is a peaceful situation). Keep in mind that the Balkans still gives worries and therefore commits 4 divisions.

11:30 Hours. I go to confer with the Duce. Various topics including G.C. for Russia.

12:40 Hours. I summon Gen. Gandin, head of the unit and Lt. Col. Fornara, head of department. Topics:

Conclusions about the possibility of giving 6 divisions for Russia.

- .....

24/10/1941:

09:45 hours. I receive the Exc. Scuero. Topics:

- .....

- .....

Grande Units for Russia. Their constitution (partial motorization of the services).

- .....

31/10/1941:

17:00 Hours. I receive the Exc. Roatta. Topics:

- .....

- Sending troops to Russia. Forecast of 6 divisions plus 2 Corps commands and an army command for spring (vehicles from Germany).

- .....

Employment of Exc. Gariboldi (\*).

---

(\*) The nominated General of the Army Italo Gariboldi had recently been replaced in the offices of Governor General of Libya and Chief Commander of the Forces of North Africa and was available.

Document n. 49.

SUPREME COMMAND  
I Department  
Ordination and Training Office

October 23, 1941

APPROACH ABOUT SENDING NEW UNITS IN RUSSIA  
FOR SPRING 1942

To sell the Duce expressed the orientation to send new units on the Russian front for spring 1942, the Head of G.S.. General has examined the matter and, in a report dated 22 October, has expressed to the Duce the following considerations and proposals:

- sending units is subject to:
  - to the end of the Army's expansion program planned for spring 1942;
  - to a situation of tranquility both in the Balkans and at the western frontier;

- if this last hypothesis is admitted, we could make available 6 divisions at most, subtracting them from the units of the western frontier and those of the central reserve; these units could be supplied with complete personnel of men and means.

However, they:

- they would not receive the added share of arms against tanks and anti-aircraft supplied to units already sent to the Russian front;
- they would not receive vehicles for their road transport; these vehicles should be provided by the Germanic authorities.

Document n. 50.

SUMMARY OF LETTER FROM THE FUHRER TO THE DUCE  
on 30 December 1941

*Russian front in general.* Hitler says that over 6 months available, 3 were bad weather and this prevented operations. 8 – 10 more days of good weather would have ensured more advanced results. In recent times the temperature has dropped to – 38° C making it impossible to use the vehicles and continue operations, hence the decision to choose a cheaper line

and less far from supplies, so as to prepare for the recovery in spring. Means flow to the front sufficiently for winter needs.

*North Russian front.* Hitler says that at any cost he will prevent the Russians from resuming their connection with Leningrad and that the Russians will certainly have a bloody defeat here.

*Russian Front Center.* Hitler says that winter positions are taken with the criteria mentioned above.

*Russian Front South.* The Führer says that with the retreat to the line of the Mius the front is fixed and the Russian attempts have been cut short by vigorous counterattacks of the Italians of which he praises.

*Spring recovery.* In this regard, *Hitler* says that *thanks to the Italian Corps. (6 divisions)* who will constitute an army to whose command Germanic forces will be subjected. Wise that as he wants to resume the action as soon as *the good season is offered it will be good for the new units to flow during the winter* (at one point in the letter also mentions that the German forces in Finland are normally subjected to the Finnish command).

In this regard, he says he has given orders that Sinferopol [Sevastopol] be taken at all costs so that the Crimea constitutes a solid pillar of the southern front.

....  
....

Document n. 51.

#### EXCERPTS FROM THE CAVALLERO DIARY

(2 December 1941 - 30 January 1942)

2/12/1941:

19:15 hours. I receive the Lt. Col. Fornara. Topic:

Large units for Russia and Montenegro reinforcement units.

2/1/1942:

17:50 hours. I receive the Exc. Roatta. Topics:

- ....

- Study of the transport that the Germans should provide for the new troops for the CSIR. Need to *see the operation of the services of a first Corps before sending a second and a third.*

3/1/1942:

17:30 hours. I receive the Exc. Roatta and Generals Rossi, Gandin and Fassi.

Topics:

- ....



- Orient the establishment of Corps and the Army for CSIR.

By the way, Exc. Roatta poses serious difficulties for the means of connection.

16/1/1942:

11:15 hours. I confer with Gen. von Rintelen. Topics:

- Need to finish the transport of the complement for the CSIR before sending other troops. I say that it is quicker to fix CSIR than to send new units. Fixed April 1st as the presumed date. I ask, however, when we can have trains. After this shipment we will think about the Alpine Corps but for this we need to examine together the problem of the Balkans and the security of our borders. That of the Balkans is a big problem and we do not have the necessary strength to face it. We also have a disturbing situation in the arms and ammunition sector. I say that I have the feeling that a big rebellion is being prepared in the spring and if we were to do a real campaign, consumption would increase a lot.

We need to see the problem well and establish a plan. This is the thought of the Duce. For now nothing can be done because there is snow. We must wait for the success our division is now doing, but it can be expected that it will not do much.

- .....

19/1/1942:

09:20 hours. I receive the Exc. Roatta (\*). Topics:

- .....

- G.U. for the CSIR and my report to the Germans of the impossibility to start sending before the 10th of April.

- .....

21/1/1942:

18:30 hours. I receive the Exc. Ambrosio (\*\*). Topics:

- .....

- Use of G.U. for Russia (3 divisions). Our report to Germany about the impossibility of equipping them with vehicles.

- .....

27/1/1942:

09:30 hours. I receive the Exc. Scuero. Topics:

- .....

- Designation of the Army Group commander for Russia.

10:20 Hours. I receive Gen. von Rintelen. Topics:

- .....

---

(\*) General Mario Roatta ceased on that day from the post of Chief of Staff of the Army, to take over the command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, exchanging appointments with General Ambrosio.

(\*\*) The appointed General of the Armata Vittorio Ambrosio was the Chief of Staff of the Army since 19 January 1942.

- Motor vehicles. We do not have any. The units that will go to Russia will be without vehicles. Von Rintelen objects that they too have few. I point out that they have the means for supplies, while we are lacking.

- .....

11:20 Hours. I resume my interview with *Gen. von Rintelen*. *This asks for news on the preparation of the divisions for Russia*. I answer that we have 3 divisions ready and we also make the command of Corps. For March, if all the additions have gone, the divisions can flow.

After these the Alpine can go. But I repeat that they will not have vehicles.

18:25 hours. I receive the Exc. Ambrosio. Topic:

- Alpine divisions situation. Part of Alpine divisions for Russia. Exc. states that he never had directives about it. Conclusions: the divisions for Russia would be 3 infantry and 3 alpine.

I inform you that you must complete the CSIR first and need 72 trains.

Therefore, only after March 15 will begin start to flow the divisions. Each division requires 20 days. So 3 months to bring the divisions, plus the command of Corps. Only in mid-June you can talk about the Alpine and in the meantime the situation will be outlined. The Duce cares a lot but if the situation does not recommend it we will do without sending the Alpine divisions.

I inform you that I have also ordered the Corps command and that I insisted with von Rintelen in pointing out that we have absolutely no vehicles and if we can not get them we will have to suspend the sending of troops.

Exc. Ambrosio informs that the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> rapid divisions today are incomplete (\*) .Transportable are only the Torino and Pasubio. There are 3 others (Piacenza, Veneto and Mantua) (\*\*) but there are no vehicles.

.....

Later I inform you that it will be necessary to set up the Alpine Corps and also the Army command. About this mention also to the figure of the commander and to the ideas of Duce about S.A.R. the Prince of Piemonte.....

- Problem Gariboldi. He has already commanded a group of armies. Albania is too small for him but could take an army.

30/1/1942:

18:15 hours. I receive the Exc. Ambrosio. Topics:

- .....

---

(\*) The state of incompleteness of the rapid divisions, referred to by the Chief of Staff of the Army, derived from various organic causes: the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Celere Division had to cede units to the 3<sup>rd</sup> when this was departing for the Russian front: the 2<sup>nd</sup> was in full transformation into an armored division, the 3<sup>rd</sup>, which had been operating for six months at the Russian front, was incomplete not only because of the numerous losses suffered in men, horses and various vehicles, but was also about to become motorized division by changing the two mounted cavalry regiments with one of the motorized Bersaglieri and by motorizing what he already had and replacing the horse artillery regiment, with a motorized one, acquiring a mortars battalion and a third company of 47/32 anti-tank guns.

(\*\*) They were large units in the process of being established and therefore not readily employable.

- Anti-tank weapons and of 20 the new G.U. for the CSIR. Consequent requests made to the Germans together with those of the trucks for the general service (\*). Assignment by the Duce to question a high personality for the assumption of the command of the CSIR and the need for the situation on that front to be well defined. Direct dependence on O.K.A .. (\*\*)

- .....

Document n. 52.

SUPREME COMMAND  
I Department  
Ordination and Training Office

January 28, 1942

SUMMARY OF THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE HEAD OF G.S. GENERALE  
AND THE HEAD OF THE G.S. OF THE ARMY  
IN THE AFTERNOON OF 27 JANUARY 1942 – XX

*Exc. Cavallero.*

The sending of the three Div. of Inf. in Russia it will not be able to start before March 15th. I insisted on the Germans that for this date the deferral of supplies and supplies to the C.S.I.R ..

Since the sending of a division commits about twenty days, the transport of the three divisions can not be completed until mid-June.

Only then could the sending of the Alpine be started.

We will therefore have the necessary time to determine in relation to the evolution of the situation if the sending of the alpine units will be necessary.

*Conclusion:* we prepare a Corps Command and 3 Inf. Div. that certainly will go. We also prepare the three Alpine Div. with the aforementioned vision.

*Exc. Ambrosio.*

Exposes the situation of the Army units.

*Div. alpine:* for spring they will not be completely complete but usable.

*Div. Celere:* the 2<sup>nd</sup> is transforming into an armored, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> is incomplete, the 3<sup>rd</sup> will be a Bersaglieri division.

---

(\*) The German army acceded the more powerful counter-tank weapons of the 47/32 cannons, delivering in the summer 1942 the armament of nine six-piece batteries, 75/39 cb - mode 97 - 38, each destined to a division, except for the Division "Vicenza".

(\*\*) The initials "O.K.A. "Stated in the original document, is meaningless. It may mean "O.K.W." (Supreme Command of the Armed Forces), or "O.K.H." (Supreme Command of the Army)"

*Div. auto-transportable*: "Torino" and "Pasubio" to C.S.I.R., "Piacenza", "Veneto", "Mantova" incomplete.

*Div. Armored*: 4, "Ariete", "Centauro", "Littorio", "2<sup>nd</sup> Celere". "Ariete" (De Stefanis) (\*) has taken Littorio's tanks and is completing. "Littorio" (Gen. Bitossi) (\*\*) with 12<sup>th</sup> bersaglieri, Bn. 1 Bd Tanks and with 1 bty. anti-tank and crews without tanks is recovering. The "Centauro" will be complete at the end of April. "2<sup>nd</sup> Celere" incomplete.

*Div. motorized type A.S.*: "Lombardia", "Superga", "Piave", "Pistoia" ready at the end of April. "Savona" (non-existent), "Brescia", "Trento", "Pavia", "Bologna", "Trieste", "Sabrata" incomplete.

*D. Paratroopers*: Complete at the end of April.

*D. Air Transporter*: Complete at the end of June.

*Div. Inf.*: 39, 2 completed ("Granatieri" and "Livorno") and 37 incomplete.

At the end of April will be complete 6.

*Exc. Cavallero.*

He stresses the need to make every effort to ensure that 33 divisions are 100% complete, in particular, of the central reserve.

#### *Situation in Croatia*

*Exc. Ambrosio.*

He advocates the opportunity for coordinated action and directives to the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army about the action to be taken in the spring for the repression of the rebellion.

*Exc. Cavallero.*

Agrees on these opportunities but points to the difficulty, from the German side, of forecasts about the availability of forces at that time. It adds that the Duce has already drawn up the directive to keep the Dinaric line; that it will still be necessary to stick to the concept of large garrisons, linked by motorized columns and armored vehicles.

---

(\*)General of Division Giuseppe De Stefanis was the Commander of the "Ariete" Armored Division.

(\*\*) The General of Division Gervasio Bitossi was the Commander of the Littorio Armored Division.

EXCERPTS FROM THE CAVALLERO DIARY  
(February 5 - 28, 1942)

5/2/1942:

*18:15 hours.* I Receive General von Rintelen. Topics:

- .....
- Old weapons. We will do research, but we do not have it, neither anti-tank, or trucks to give to the G.U. for Russia.

8/2/1942:

*18:25 Hours.* I Receive Lt. Col. Fornara. Topics:

- .....
- Transport G.U. in Russia. They deferred to May.

12/2/1942:

*13:30 Hours.* I receive General von Rintelen. Topics:

- Appointment G.U. for Russia.
- Our need for anti-tank, anti-aircraft and trucks at least for supplies. We have given 5,000 trucks to CSIR but we can not replenish them It is not bad will but there are none. In order to supply the CSIR I would have to take the trucks of Libya.....

- .....

*18:40 Hours.* I receive the Exc. Pietromarchi and Exc. Ambrosio. Topics:

- .....
- Our units for Russia. Exc. Ambrosio to prepare 3 alpine divisions for the 1st of June.

14/2/1942:

*10:15 Hours.* I receive Gen. von Rintelen. Topics:

- .....
  - New preparation date for G.U. for Russia.
- 10:25 Hours.* Telephone to Exc. Ambrosio. Topic:
- Commitment with OKW not only for the second Corps Zingales with 3 divisions but also for all units of the second. I ask if I can establish the date of June 1.
- 10:30 Hours.* Resume the interview with Gen. von Rintelen. Topic:
- Means absolutely needed for the new G.U. for Russia (anti-tank, anti-aircraft, vehicles). Please bear this in mind because our units could not move or refuel.

- Commander of the Army for Russia. Augusta Persona (\*). I give the news in a very confidential and I recommend not to talk about it and if you ever say the thing to OKW in secret.

- German troops at the orders of the Army that would go to Russia and hints to the Führer in this regard.

Direct Dependency of the Army on the OKW.

- .....

*Hours 17:05.* I receive the Exc. Bergia (\*\*) in separate premises. Topics:

- *75/46 mobile batteries* that can be made available to Russia (2 from Genoa, 2 from Turin, 3 from Rome, 2 from Guidonia). He will replace them with 76/40 (\*\*\*) batteries from other locations. He would also want to send pieces of 20 mm. I give him as a directive to prepare the three groups for 1 June (one for the Army and 2 for the Corps).

*18:35 Hours.* I receive Gen. von Rintelen. Topics:

- .....

- *I inform you that the Duce to ask the ally as little as possible has turned to Exc. Bergia and had anti-aircraft batteries removed from the anti-aircraft defense. He will try to remedy the anti-tank. But we absolutely do not find the lorries and Duce hopes that the ally in view of our good will takes care of it.*

16/02/1942:

*10:30 Hours.* I receive Gen. von Rintelen. Topics:

- .....

- Army command and alpine command. Telephone to Exc. Ambrosio and confirmed the date of 1 June report to the General von Rintelen telling him that *for anti-tank and anti-air we will reduce the armament of some towns and so we can arm the G.U., but the problem of motor vehicles remains insoluble.*

18/02/1942:

*10:30 Hours.* I receive General von Rintelen. Topics:

- Automobile needs. Please inform us that we do not have more than 500 vehicles I had set aside at my disposal because we had to distribute them for urgent reasons. The Piave is motorized but is already booked for Libya where Rommel himself recognized the need for a motorized unit. So the *OKW should think of him to give the means necessary for our units* in the number that it judges appropriate in relation to the distance of the railways. Responsibility can not be given to a command. of an Army.

---

(\*) It was said to entrust the command to the Prince of Piemonte, Inspector of the Infantry Arm.

(\*\*) General of the Corps Claudio Bergia was the Chief State Officer of the Army for the Defense of the Territory.

(\*\*\*) Maximum span of 7,900 meters,

27/02/1942:

18:05 Hours. I receive General von Rintelen. Topics:

- .....

- Use of Corps to the east front. General von Rintelen says they have lost a lot of material and *therefore do not yet know what they will be able to give on the subject of lorries*. It will therefore be necessary to study our supplies as an assembly problem. He proposes to use CSIR vehicles. I think that 4,000 is reduced to a few hundred. Anyway, I'll get more information about it. But I'm afraid the problem is very serious.

- .....

- OKW thinking about appointing High Personality to the Command of the Italian Army in Russia. Difficulties get in the way. Army very much set. The Marshal has not yet spoken about the assignment of German troops to the army. I wonder if General Gariboldi would be well seen. General von Rintelen responds affirmatively. I agree. He's a man on whom you can count even if a bit tired.... The other generals, Nasi (\*) and Zanghieri (\*\*), have excellent preparation.

28/2/1942:

9:00 hours. I went to the audience of the G.S. the Emperor King. Various topics ... and information from General von Rintelen about the new appearance of the command in Russia (without mentioning the intentions that were about the commander).

11:30 Hours. I'm going to a conference with the Duce .....

Various topics including Commander Russia Corp. Difficulty proposed by von Rintelen.

.....

17:15 Hours. Telephone to Exc. Scuro. Topics:

- Corps for Russia.

- .....

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(\*)General of the Corps Gabriele Nasi was Commander of the XXVI Corps.

(\*\*)General of the Corps Giovanni Zanghieri was Commander of the II Corps.

UNITS OF THE 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY  
DIRECTLY EMPLOYED UNITS

Carabinieri: 1 Section on Horseback, Motorized Section, 8 Mixed Sections.

Division

“Vicenza”: 2 Carabinieri Sections, 1 Carabinieri Battalion, 2 Infantry Regiments (3 bns, 1 co of 47/32 acc., 1 cp. mortars of 81), 1 Machine gun Battalion, 1 Company of 47/32 A/T, 1 Battalions Mixed Engineers, 1 Section of Health, 2 Hospitals, 1 Section Substance, 1 Squad bakers with Rotary Furnaces, 1 mixed vehicle section, 1 Military Post Office.

Regimental Groups

on horseback: 2 Cavalry Regiments (each 2 groups of sq. and 1 sq. Machine gun), Horse Artillery Regiment (3 groups of 2 batteries).

Infantry: 1 Battalion Machine guns, 1 Battalion Alpine Skiers

Artillery: 1 Regimental Group Artillery of the Army (2 gr. of 149/28, 3 gr. of 149/40, 1 gr. of 210/22), 1 Artillery Regiment Motorized A/T (3 gr. of 75/32), 1 Regimental Artillery Group A/A. (5 gr. of 75/46), 4 Batteries A/A. of 20, 1 Special Unit, 1 Photoelectric Section.

Engineers: 1 Battalions Artisans, 1 Transmission Group (2 bn.), 1 Telemarconisti Company, 1 Mobile Pigeon coop, 2 Hydrographic companies, Firefighters, 4 bridging Battalions, 1 Ferry Company, 2 Railway Battalions, 2 Workers Battalions.

Chemical: 1 Chemical Grouping (2 bn).

Air Force: The Observation Group (2 squadrons), The Terrestrial Fighters Group (4 squadrons).

Croatian Legion with: 1 Rifle Battalion, 1 81 mm mortars Company, 1 Company of 47/32 A/T.

SUMMARY

Carabinieri: 1 Battalion and 12 Sections.

Battalions: 33 (Battalions 29 + Autonomous Companies 14)

Mortars of 81: 27.

Guns of 47/32: 28.

Guns of 20: 32.

Guns of 75/27

mod.1912: 24.

Guns of 75/32 A/T: 36.

Guns of 75/46 A/A: 52.

Guns of 149 /28: 24

Guns of 149/40: 36

Guns of 210/22: 12.



## *II ARMY CORPS*

### UNITS DIRECTLY EMPLOYED

Carabinieri: 2 Mixed Section, 1 Section on Horseback.

Infantry: 2 Battalions mg., 1 Battalion A/T. of 47/32, 1 pioneer Battalion.

Artillery: The Artillery Group of A/A. (2 gr. 105/28 and 2 gr. 149/13), 1 Specialists unit, 2 Batteries A/A of 20.

Engineers: 1 Battalions of Artisans, 2 Telegraphic Company, 1 Radio Company, 1 Mobile Pigeon coop, 1 Materials Repairs Workshops.

Chemical: 1 Chemical Company, 2 Flamethrower Companies.

M.V.S.N .: 1 Regimental Group (4 Rifle Bns and 2 Accompanying Arms Bns).

### SERVICES

Health: 1 Health Section, 2 Radiological Ambulances, 1 Amb. Dentist., 1 Sec.

Disinfection, 12 Field Hospitals, 3 Surgical units.

Commissariat: 1 Subsistence Section.

Transportation: 1 Heavy Vehicle unit (2 Sections Auto Ambulances and 3 Sec. Mixed), 6 Heavy Automobile Parts, 3 Workshops Mode 37.

Automotive: 1 Heavy Mobile Workshop.

Recovery: 1 Recovery Company.

### " SFORZESCA " AND " COSSERIA " DIVISIONS

#### *Each*

Carabinieri: 1 Mixed Section and 1 Section Motorized.

Infantry: 2 Regiments (1 Command co., 1 co. Mortar 81, 1 Bty. Acc. 65/17, 3 bns. with: 1 co. command, 3 co. Rifle., 1 co. accomp. weapons);

1 Mortar Battalion, 2 Companies of 47/32 A/T

Artillery: 1 Motorized Regiment (1 Command unit., 1 Gr. 105 /28 with of 3 bty. and unit M. and V., 2 Gr. 75/18 with 3 bty. single M. and V. unit\*), 2 Bty. A/A of 20 mm., 1 Bty. A/T of 75/39 (6 pieces).

Engineers: 1 Company Artisans, 1 Radio Company, 1 Sec. spotlight.

Health: 1 Health Section.

Commissariat: 1 Subsistence Section.

Transportation: 1 jeep Section for Accompanying Weapons bty.

### DIVISION "RAVENNA"

Carabinieri: 1 Mixed Section and 1 Motorized Section.

Infantry: 1 Regiment (Command co., Mortar Co. 81, Bty. 65/17 acc., 3 Bns. with Command Co. 3 Co. Rifles, 1 Co. Accompanying Weapons);

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\* The M & V unit is an ammunition and food service unit

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Infantry: 1 Regiments (Command Co., 81 mm. Mortar Co., 47/32 acc. Co., 3 Bn. with Command Co., 3 Rifle Co., 1 Accompanying Weapons Co.); 1 Bn. Mortar, 2 47/32 A/T Companies.

Artillery: 1 Regiment Motorized (Unit Command, 1 Gr. 105/28 with 3 bty. and. M. and V. unit, 2 Gr. 75/18 with 3 bty. it's own M. and V. unit), 2 Bty. 20 mm. A/A, 1 Bty. 75 39 A/T. (6 pieces).

Engineers: 1 Company Artisans, 1 Radio Company. 1 Photoelectricians Sec.

Health: 1 Health Section.

Commissariat: 1 Subsistence Section

Transportation: 1 Jeep section for the accompanying bty.

## SUMMARY

Carabinieri:	9 Sections.
Battalions:	41 (32 bn. + 27 autonomous co).
Mortar of 81 mm:	153
Guns of 47/32:	94 (cc and acc.).
Artillery: of 20:	pieces 64
from 65/17:	pieces 20
from 75/39:	pieces A/T. 18
from 75/18:	pieces 72
from 75/27-11:	pieces -
from 75/13:	pieces -
from 100/17:	pieces -
from 105/11:	pieces -
from 105/28:	pieces 60
from 105/32:	pieces -
from 149/13:	pieces <u>24</u>
	<i>Total:</i> 258

armor:-

*Services:*

Health: 4 Health Sections, 2 Radiological Ambulances, 1 Dental Ambulance, Disinfection Section, 3 Surgical units, 12 Field Hospitals.

Commissariat: 4 Subsistence Sections.

Transportation: 1 Heavy Truck unit (with 2 Ambulance Sections), 6 Heavy truck sections, 3 Sections Lt trucks, 3 workshops Mod 37, 1 trailer and sleds Unit.

Post and Telegraphic: 4 Military Post Offices.

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### *XXXV ARMY CORPS (CSIR)*

#### UNITS DIRECTLY EMPLOYED

Carabinieri:	3 motorized sections.
Infantry:	1 Battalion mtr., 1 Battalion A/T of 47/32. 1 Company Bersaglieri motorcyclists, 1 Battalion Sappers.
Artillery:	1 Grouping Artillery of the Army Corps. (3 gr. 105/32 and 1 gr. 149/13), 2 Batteries A/A. of 20 mm.
Engineers:	1 Battalion of Artisans, 1. Battalion of Connections, 1 Workshop of Repairs of Connected Material, 1 Section of Photoelectricists, 1 Mobile Pigeon Coop.
Chemists:	1 Chemical Company.
M.V.S.N.:	1 Regimental Group (4 rifles Bns and 2 Accompanying Weapons Bns).

#### SERVICES

Health:	1 Health Section, 2 Amb. Radiological, 1 Amb. Dental., 1 Sec. Disinfection, 12 Field Hospitals, 3 Surgical units.
Commissariat:	1 Subsistence Section.
Transport:	1 Heavy Truck Unit (1 Section), 1 Mixed truck unit (1 Mixed Section, 1 Amb. Section, 2 Section of Jeeps), 2 Special truck units, 2 Heavy Truck Unit (each with 2 sections), 1 baggage unit.
Automotive:	1 Workshop. Heavy Mobile.
Recoveries:	1 Company Recovery.

#### DIVISION "PASUBIO"

Carabinieri:	2 Motorized Sections.
Infantry:	2 Regiments (1 Command Co., 1 81 mm. Co., 1 65/17 Accompanying Weapons Bty., 3 Bns with: 1 Command Co., 3 Rifle Co., 1 Accompanying Arms Co.); 2 Battalions mortars, 2 companies of 47/32 A/T
Artillery:	1 Regiment Motorized (1 Command Unit, 1 Gr. 100/17 with 3 bty., 2 Gr. 75/27 mode 1911 with 3 bty., 1. M. & V. unit), 2 A/A Bty. of 20 mm., 1 75/39A/A Bty. (6 pieces).
Engineers:	1 Artisans Company, 1 Radio Company, 1 Search light Section.
Health:	1 Health Section.
Commissariat:	1 Subsistence Section.
Transportation:	1 car workshop mod.37.

#### DIVISION "TORINO"

Carabinieri:	2 Motorized Sections.
Infantry:	2 Regiments (Command Co., 81 mm. Mortar Co., 47/32 acc. Co., 3 Bn. with Command Co., 3 Rifle Co., 1 Accompanying Arms Co.); 2 Bn. Mortars, 2 47/32 A/T Companies.

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Artillery: 1 Motorized Regiment (Command Unit, 1 Gr. 100/17 with 3 bty., 2 Gr. 75/27 mode 1911 with 3 bty., M. and V. unit); 2 A/A Bty. of 20 mm, 1 A/A Bty. 75/39 (6 pieces).  
 Engineers: Artisans Company, 1 Radio Company, 1 Search light Section.  
 Health: 1 Health Section.  
 Commissariat: 1 Subsistence Section.  
 Transportation: 1 workshop Mod.37.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> CELERE DIVISION

Carabinieri: 2 Celeri Sections.  
 Infantry: 2 Bersaglieri Regiments (each: Command Co., 3 Bn. with 1 Command Co., 3 Co. Bersaglieri, 1 Co. Accompanying weapons), 1 Motorcyclists Bn. (3 Co.), 1 Bn. Mortars. 3 Co. 47/32 A/T.  
 Armor: 1 Bn. Tanks L/6 (2 Co., 31 wagons);  
 1 semoventi Gr. of 47/32 (2 Squadr., 19 semoventi).  
 Artillery: 1 Motorized Regiment (Command unit, 1 Gr. 100/17 with 3 bty., 2 Gr. 75/27 mode 1911 with 3 bty., M. and V. unit);  
 2 A/A Bty. of 20 mm., 1 A/A Bty. of 75/39 (6 pieces).  
 Engineers: Artisans Company, 1 Radio Company.  
 Health: 1 Health Section.  
 Commissariat: 1 Subsistence Section.  
 Transportation: 1 Heavy Truck Group (4 truck units, 1 Workshop Mod.37).

### SUMMARY

police: 9 Sections.  
 Battalions: 44 (35 bn. + 27 co. Autonomous).  
 Mortars of 81 mm.: 189.  
 Pieces from 47/32: 108 (A/T and Acc.).  
 Artillery: of 20 mm.: pieces 64  
 of 65/17: pieces 8  
 of 75/39: pieces A/T. 18  
 of 75/18: pieces -  
 of 75/ 27-11: pieces 72  
 of 75/13: pieces -  
 of 100/17: pieces 36  
 of 105/11: pieces -  
 of 105/28: pieces -  
 of 105/32: pieces 36  
 of 149/13: pieces 12  
*Total: 246*  
 Armor: 31 L/6 wagons with 20 mm guns;  
 19 semoventi with piece of 47/32.

## Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

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### *Services:*

Health:	4 Health Sections, 2 Radiological Ambulances, 1 Dental Ambulance, 1 Disinfection Section, 3 Surgical units, 12 Field Hospitals.
Commissariat:	4 Sections of Subsistence.
Transport:	7 Heavy Truck Units, 1 Mixed Truck Unit (with 1 Ambulance Section and 1 tanker Section), 2 Special Parts, 3 Workshops Mod. 37, 1 [baggage] train unit.
Post and Telegraphic:	4 Military Post Offices.

### ALPINE ARMY CORPS DIRECTLY DEPENDENT UNITS

Carabinieri:	2 Alpine Sections.
Infantry:	
Artillery:	1 Artillery Grouping of the Army Corps. (3 gr of 105/32 and 1 gr of 149/13), 1 Specialist unit, 2 A/A Batteries of 20 mm.
Engineers:	1 Artisans Battalion, 1 Battalion Mixed Connection, 1 Mobile Pigeon Coop, 1 Rip. Mat. Connection Workshop, 1 Sapper Battalion, 1 Search light Company.
Chemists:	1 Chemical Company.
M.V.S.N. .:	

### SERVICES

Health:	1 Health Section, 1 Dental Ambulance, 1 Disinfection Section, 6 Field Hospitals
Commissariat:	1 Subsistence Section.
Transportation:	1 Mixed Truck Units (2 Heavy Sections, 1 Light Section, 1 Section of Jeeps).
Automotive:	1 Heavy Mobile Workshop.
Recoveries:	1 Recovery Company.

### DIVISIONS "TRIDENTINA", "JULIA" and "CUNEENSE" *each*

Carabinieri:	2 Alpine Sections.
Infantry:	2 Alpine Regiments (1 command co., 3 Bns with: 1 Command co., 3 co., 1 acc. arms co., 1 section health, 1 field hospital, 1 subsistence center, 1 train section). 2 Companies of 47/32 A/T.
Artillery:	1 Regiment (1 Command Unit., 2 Gr. 75/13 with 3 bty. And M. and V. Unit, 1 Gr. 105/11 with 2 bty. And M. and V. unit), 2 Bty. A/A of 20 mm., 1 Bty. A/T 75/39 (6 pieces).
Engineers:	1 Mixed Battalion (1 Artisans Company, 1 Radio Company, 1 search light Section).

Health: 1 Health Section, 4 Field Hospitals.  
 Commissariat: 1 Subsistence Section.  
 Transportation: 1 Mixed Truck Unit (5 sections and 1 section of tank trucks), 1 train unit.

### SUMMARY

Carabinieri: 8 Sections.  
 Battalions: 28 (24 Bn. + 13 co. Autonomous).  
 Mortars of 81 mm.: 54  
 Guns of 47/32: 48.

Artillery: of 20 mm.: pieces 64  
 of 65/17: pieces -  
 of 75/39: pieces A/T. 18  
 of 75/18: pieces -  
 of 75/27-11: pieces -  
 of 75/13: pieces 72  
 of 100/17: pieces -  
 of 105/11: pieces 24  
 of 105/28: pieces -  
 of 105/32: pieces 36  
 of 149/13: pieces 12  
 Total: 226

Armor: -

*Services:*

Health: 10 Health Sections, or Radiological Ambulances, 1 Dental Ambulance, 1 Disinfection Section, or Surgical Units, 24 Field Hospitals.  
 Commissariat: 4 Subsistence Sections, 6 Subsistence Units.  
 Transport: 4 Mixed Truck Units (with 3 Tanker Sections), 3 train units, 6 train Sections.  
 Post and Telegraphic: 4 Military Post Offices.

### 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY QUARTERMASTER

Carabinieri: 1 Company and 3 Mixed Sections.  
 Health: Health Directorate, 1 Healthcare Warehouse, 36 Field Hospitals, 6 Reserve Hospitals, 2 Convalescents. 2 Gas Reclamation Sections, 2 Disinfection Sections, 1 Chemical Laboratory - Bacteriological - Toxicological, 20 Hospital Trains.  
 Commissariat: Commissariat Management, 1 Food and Oats Warehouse, 1 Forage Warehouse, Straw and Wood Warehouse, 1 Clothing and Equipment Warehouse, 1 Butchers Company,

	4 Sections Subsistence, 4 Bakers Sections with rotary ovens, 11 Teams Bakers with rotary ovens, 1 Section Bakers with road ovens, 6 Baker Sections without furnaces, 1 Mixed Bakery Team.
Administration:	Administration Direction.
Artillery:	Artillery Directorate, 1 Artillery Warehouse.
Engineer:	Directorate of Engineers, 1 Engineer Warehouse, 1 Artisans Company.
Chemical:	Chemical Directorate, 1 Chemical Warehouse, Field Chemical Laboratory.
Horse and Veterinary:	Directorate of Horse and Veterinary, 1 Veterinary Magazine and Warehouse, 1 Horse Park, Carriage and Harnesses, 7 Horse Infirmaryes.
Transport:	Directorate of Transport, 2 Battalions of Road Movement (6 Companies and 2 Roadside Assistance units), 2 Militias of the Road, 4 Self-Groups (in total: 33 Heavy truck units, 1 Mixed Truck unit, 2 Ambulance units, 1 tanker unit, 9 Garages) .
Automotive:	Automotive Directorate, 2 Automotive Parks, 6 Truck Group workshops, 2 FIAT Special Workshops.
Stages:	Directorate of the Stages, 3 Main Stage Controls, 6 Secondary Stage Controls, 11 Special Stage Controls, 4 Main Stage Offices, 7 Mobile Territorial Battalions, 8 Artillery Groups without transport, 1 Garrison Company.
Post and Telegraphic:	Postal and Telegraph Directorate, 7 Military Post Offices.
Recovery:	Recovery Directorate, 1 Recovery Company.
Roads:	Road Directorate.
Economy of War:	Directorate of War Economy.
Timber:	Wood Management, 2 Forestry Companies.

#### GRAND TOTAL 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY

Carabinieri:	1 Battalion, 1 Company, 41 Sections.
Infantry:	164 Battalions, 423 Mortars of 81, 266 pieces of 47/32.
Armor:	31 L/6 tanks with 20 mm. cannon, 19 Semoventi 47/32.
Artillery:	224 pieces of 20 mm., 28 pieces of 65/17 of accompaniment, 54 pieces of 75/39 A/T, 72 pieces of 75/18, 72 pieces of 75/27 mode 1911 TM, 24 pieces of 75/27 1912 horse drawn, 72 pieces of 75/13 mule carried, 36 pieces of 75/32 A/T, 52 pieces of 75/46 A/A, 36 pieces of 100/17, 24 pieces of 105/11 wheeled, 60 pieces of 105/28, 72 105/32 pieces, 48 pieces of 149/13, 24 pieces of 149/28, 36 pieces of 149/40, 12 pieces of 210/22. <i>In total: 946 pieces</i>

Air Force: 2 observation squadrons, 4 Ground based fighter squadrons,  
Healthcare: 19 Health Sections, 4 Radiological Ambulances, 3 Dental Ambulances, 5  
Disinfection Sections, 2 Gas Reclamation Sections, 6 Surgical  
Units, 84 Field Hospitals, 6 Reserve Hospitals, 2 Convalescents, 1  
Chemical - Bacteriological - Toxicological Laboratory. 20 Hospital  
Trains, 1 Healthcare Warehouse,  
Commissariat: 17 Subsistence Sections, 6 Alpine Support Units, 1 Food and Oats  
Warehouse, 1 Forage, Straw and Wood Warehouse, 1 Clothing and  
Equipment Warehouse, 1 Butchers Company, 11 Bakers Sections,  
13 Bakers Teams,  
Artillery: Artillery Warehouse.  
Engineers: Engineers Warehouse.  
Chemical: Chemical Warehouse, 1 Field Chemical Laboratory.  
Horse and Veterinary: 1 horse and Veterinary Warehouse, 1 pack animal, cartage and  
sleds park, 7 draft animal Infirmarys.  
Transports: 50 truck units, 2 ambulances units, 2 Tanker unit, 12 Garages, 7 train units,  
cartage and Sled unit.  
Automotive: 2 Automotive Parks, 8 Workshops.  
Stages: 24 Stage Controls.  
Post  
and Telegraphic: 19 Military Post Offices.  
Recuperation: 4 Recovery Companies,  
Timber: 2 Forester Companies,

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## ORDER OF BATTLE OF THE 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY

### 8th ARMY

### COMMAND

Commander: Gen. of Army Italo Gariboldi.  
Head of G. S: Gen. of Div. Bruno Malaguti.  
Artillery Commander: Gen. of Div. Mario Balotta.  
Commander of the Engineers: Gen. of Div. Arnaldo Forgiero.  
Commander of the Chemical Troops: Lt. Col. Cesiro Mischi.  
Air Force Commander: Gen. of Air Bd. Enrico Pezzi.



## II ARMY CORPS

### COMMAND

Commander: Gen. C.A. Giovanni Zanghieri.  
Chief of the G.S: Col. Ugo Almici.  
Cmdr. of Artillery: Gen. B. Mario Martorelli (1).  
Cmdr of Engineers: Gen. B. Balilla Rima.

### HEADQUARTERS

Carabinieri mixed sections 183<sup>rd</sup> and 204<sup>th</sup>.  
Carabinieri horse mounted section 362<sup>nd</sup>.  
9<sup>th</sup> Topocartographic Section.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Photographic Squad.  
9<sup>th</sup> Telephonic Squad.  
20<sup>th</sup> Military Post Office.  
21<sup>st</sup> Truck Trailer Command.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Automotive unit for Command of C.A..

### DIRECTLY DEPENDENT UNITS

*Infantry.*  
II Machine-gun Battalion of Army Corps.  
CII Truck-mounted machine-gun Battalion.  
XXXII Anti-tank Battalion of 47/32 Granatieri di Sardegna.  
II Battalion of sappers Infantry.

*Artillery.*  
2<sup>nd</sup> artillery grouping of Army Corps. (Cmdr Col. Enrico Grimaldi) (2), with Groups:  
    III and XXIII of 105/28 cannons;  
    CIII, CXXIII, CXXIV (3) group howitzers of 149/13.  
    2<sup>nd</sup> Artillery specialists unit.  
    52<sup>nd</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup> Anti-aircraft batteries of 20mm.

*Engineers.*  
XV Artisans Battalion with:  
    1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 104<sup>th</sup> Companies Artisans. 82<sup>nd</sup> and 84<sup>th</sup> Telegraph company.  
    101<sup>st</sup> Radio Company.  
    6<sup>th</sup> mobile pigeon coop.  
    2<sup>nd</sup> mobile workshop for materials of connection.

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(1) Until November 30 1942. From 1 December: Gen. B. Italo Giglio.

(2) Until November 30, 1942. From December 1st: Lt. Col. i.g.s. Liberato Mascagna.

(3) Transferred to the 30<sup>th</sup> Group of Army Corps from July 26, 1942.

*Chemical.*

2<sup>nd</sup> Chemical Company "A".  
4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Flamethrower Companies.

*M.V.S.N.*

Regimental Group CC.NN. "March 23" (Cmdr. Lgt. Gen. Enrico Francisci) (1), with:  
Battalion Group CC.NN. "Valle Scrivia" (Cmdr. Consul Mario Bertoni) with:  
V and XXXIV Bn. CC.NN .;  
XLI Btg. CC.NN. accompanying weapons;  
Battalion Group CC.NN. "Leonessa" (Cmdr. Consul Graziano Sardu) with:  
XIV and XV Bn. CC.NN .;  
XXXVIII Bty. CC.NN. accompanying weapons.

SERVICES

*of Health:*

82<sup>nd</sup> Section of Health.  
27<sup>th</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Radiological ambulance.  
2<sup>nd</sup> dental ambulance.  
11<sup>th</sup> disinfection Section.  
Field Hospitals: 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 118<sup>th</sup>, 119<sup>th</sup>, 120<sup>th</sup>, 243<sup>rd</sup>, 438<sup>th</sup>, 805<sup>th</sup>.  
Surgical units: 27<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, 105<sup>th</sup>

*of Commissariat:*

70<sup>th</sup> Subsistence Section.

*Transportation:*

2<sup>nd</sup> Heavy Truck Unit (with two sections ambulances and three mixed sections).  
6 Heavy sections.  
3 Workshops Mod. 37

*Automotive:*

45<sup>th</sup> Heavy Mobile Workshop.

*Recovery:*

4<sup>th</sup> Recovery Company.

INFANTRY DIVISION "SFORZESCA" (2nd)  
COMMAND

Commander: Gen. Div. Carlo Pellegrini.  
Chief of G.S: Lt. Col. Giovanni Fiore.

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(1) Until November 1942. From November 1942 Lieutenant Gen. Luigi Martinesi

## HEADQUARTERS

4<sup>th</sup> Mixed Carabinieri Section.  
5<sup>th</sup> Carabinieri Motorized Section.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Automotive unit for Cmdr of Inf. Div..  
69<sup>th</sup> Military Post Office.

## INFANTRY

Commander of Infantry Div.: Gen. Bd. Michele Vaccaro.  
53<sup>rd</sup> Inf. Regt. "Umbria" (Cmdr. Col. Massimo Contini) with:  
    Command and Regt. Command Co.;  
    co. mortars of 81;  
    bty. cannons accomp. of 65/17;  
    Battalion. (I, II, III) each with:  
    Cmd and co. of Cmd of Bn .; three co. riflemen;  
    accomp. weapons co. (machine guns and mortars of 45).  
54<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt. "Umbria" (Cmdr. Col. Mario Viale) with:  
    Command and Regt. Command Co.;  
    co. mortars of 81;  
    bty. cannons accomp. of 65/17;  
    Battalion. (I, II, III) each with:  
    Cmd and co. of Cmd of Bn .; three co. riflemen;  
    accomp. weapons co. (machine guns and mortars of 45).  
II Battalion of Divisional Mortar (of 81).  
2<sup>nd</sup> and 121<sup>st</sup> A/T Cannon Company of 47/32.

## ARTILLERY

17<sup>th</sup> Regt. Motorized Artillery (Cmdr. Col. Achille Tirindelli) with:  
    Cmdr and Cmdr of Regt. Unit;  
    Regt. Munitions and Food Unit (for Groups of 75/18);  
    I Group 105/28 with three bty. and Munitions and Foods unit;  
    I and II Group of 75/18 howitzer each with three bty..  
53<sup>rd</sup> and 302<sup>nd</sup> Anti-aircraft battery of 20 mm.  
70<sup>th</sup> 75/39 anti-tank guns (with six pieces).

## ENGINEERS

16<sup>th</sup> Artisans Company.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Telegraphist and Marconist Company.  
8<sup>th</sup> Section Photoelectricists.

## SERVICES

*of Health:*  
6<sup>th</sup> Health Section.

*of Commissariat:*

1st Subsistence Section.

*Transportation:*

2<sup>nd</sup> section of trucks (for accompanying btys).

### INFANTRY DIVISION "RAVENNA" (3<sup>rd</sup>)

#### COMMAND

Commander: Gen. of Div. Eduardo Nebbia (1).

Chief of G.S.: Lt. Col. Paolo Ducros.

#### HEADQUARTERS

7<sup>th</sup> Mixed Carabinieri Section.

8<sup>th</sup> Carabinieri Motorized Section.

3<sup>rd</sup> Automotive Squad.

53<sup>rd</sup> Military Post Office.

#### INFANTRY

Infantry Div. Commander: Gen. Of Bd. Manlio Capizzi.

37<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt. "Ravenna" (Cmdr. Col. Giovanni Naldoni) with:

Cmdr. and Regt. Command Co.; cp. 81 mortars;

Acc. cannons bty. of 65/17;

Battalion. (I, II, III) each with:

Cmdr. and Bn. Command Co.; three rifle Co.;

cp. accompanying weapons (MG and mortars of 45).

38<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt. "Ravenna" (Cmdr. Col. Mario Bianchi) with:

Cmdr. and Regt. Command Co.; cp. 81 mortars;

Acc. cannons bty. of 65/17;

Battalion. (I, II, III) each with:

Cmdr. and Bn. Command Co.; three rifle Co.;

cp. accompanying weapons (MG and mortars of 45).

III Divisional Mortar Battalion (of 81).

3<sup>rd</sup> and 154<sup>th</sup> A/T Cannon Company of 47/32.

#### ARTILLERY

121<sup>st</sup> Motorized Regt. Group (Cmdr. Col. Giacomo Manfredi) with:

Cmdr and Regt. Cmd Unit;

Regt. Munitions and Food Unit (for the Groups of 75/18);

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(1) Until October 3, 1942. From October 3 1942 Gen. of Bd. i.g.s. Francesco Dupont,

XXVIII Group of 105/28 (with three batteries and Ammunition and Food unit);  
I and II Group of 75/18 howitzers each with three batteries.  
51<sup>st</sup> and 303<sup>rd</sup> A/A battery with cannons of 20 mm.  
71<sup>st</sup> A/T battery with cannons of 75/39 (with six pieces).

#### ENGINEERS

18<sup>th</sup> company of artisans.  
3<sup>rd</sup> telegraph and radio company.  
10<sup>th</sup> searchlight section.

#### SERVICES

*of Health:*

18<sup>th</sup> Health Section.

*of Commissariat:*

7<sup>th</sup> Subsistence Section.

*Transportation:*

3<sup>rd</sup> section of trucks (for bty of acc.).

#### INFANTRY DIVISION "COSSERIA" (5<sup>th</sup>)

##### COMMAND

Commander: Gen. of Div. Enrico Gazzale.

Chief of G.S.: Col. Giuseppe Stefanelli (1).

##### HEADQUARTERS

13<sup>th</sup> Mixed Carabinieri Section.  
14<sup>th</sup> motorized Carabinieri section.  
5th Automotive Squad.  
42<sup>nd</sup> Military Post Office.

##### INFANTRY

Infantry Div. Commander: Gen. of Bd. Vincenzo Robertiello.

89<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt. "Salerno" (Cmdr Col. Paolino Maggio) with:

Cmdr and co. of Regt. Command;

81 mm. mortars co.;

bty. of cannons acc. from 65/17;

Battalion. (I, II, III) each with:

Cmdr and co. of Bn Command .;

three rifle co.;

co. of acc. arms (machine guns and mortars of 45).

90<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt. "Salerno" (Cmdr Col. Aldo Guasconi) (2) with:

Cmdr and co. of Regt. Command;

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(1) Until 1 November. From 2<sup>nd</sup> November Lt. Col. Giuseppe Massaioli.

(2) Until October 31st. On 1 November, Lt. Col. Giacomo Lapenna.

81 mm mortars co.;  
65/17 acc. cannons bty.;  
Battalion. (I, II, III) each with:  
Cmdr and Bn Cmd Co.;  
three rifle co.;  
arms acc. co. (machine guns and mortars of 45).  
CV Divisional Mortar Battalion (of 81).  
135<sup>th</sup> and 355<sup>th</sup> A/T Cannon Company of 47/32.

#### ARTILLERY

108<sup>th</sup> Motorized Regt. Group (Cmdr. Col. Ernesto Drammi) with:  
Cmd and Regt. Cmd unit;  
Regt ammunition and food unit (for the Groups of 75/18);  
Group IV of 105/28 (with three batteries and Ammunition and Food unit);  
I and II Group of 75/18 howitzers each with three batteries.  
87<sup>th</sup> and 305<sup>th</sup> A/A cannons battery of 20 mm.  
72<sup>nd</sup> A/T Cannon battery of 75/39 (with six pieces).

#### ENGINEERS

23<sup>rd</sup> artisans Company.  
5<sup>th</sup> telegraphs and radio Company.  
53<sup>rd</sup> Spotlight section.

#### SERVICES

*of Health:*  
47<sup>th</sup> Health Section.  
*of Commissariat:*  
48<sup>th</sup> Subsistence Section.  
*Transportation:*  
5th section of trucks (for acc. bty).

#### XXXV ARMY CORPS (CSIR)

#### COMMAND

Commander: Gen. of Corps Giovanni Messe (1).  
Chief of G.S: Col. Umberto Utili (2).  
Cmdr. of Artillery: Gen. B. Francesco Dupont (3).  
Cmdr of Engineers: Gen. B. Mario Tirelli.

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(1) Until October 31st 1942. From November 1st Gen. of Corps Francesco Zingales.  
(2) Until October 31st 1942. From November 1st Col. Gaetano Vargas.  
(3) Until October 2, 1942. From October 2, 1942 Gen. of Bd. Adriano Perrod.

#### HEADQUARTERS

Motorized Carabinieri Sections 193<sup>rd</sup>, 194<sup>th</sup>, 684<sup>th</sup>  
33<sup>rd</sup> Topocartographic Section.  
33<sup>rd</sup> Photographic section.  
33<sup>rd</sup> Section topographs for artillery.  
88<sup>th</sup> Military Post Office.  
Photocopy unit.  
Automotive unit for Corps.  
13<sup>th</sup> road movement unit.  
1<sup>st</sup> Fuel Section.

#### DIRECTLY DEPENDENT UNITS

##### *Infantry.*

CIV Machine-gun Battalion of Corps  
II 47/32 anti-tank Cannon Battalion.  
XV sappers Infantry Battalion.  
1<sup>st</sup> Bersaglieri Motorcyclist Company.

##### *Artillery.*

30<sup>th</sup> Grouping of Artillery of Corps (Col. Lorenzo Matiotti) with:  
Groups:  
LX, LXI and LXII 105/32 cannons;  
CXXIV howitzers of 149/13 (1);  
95<sup>th</sup> and 97<sup>th</sup> Anti-aircraft Batteries of 20 mm.

##### *Engineers.*

IV Battalion artisans with:  
1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Company of artisans.  
VIII Battalion connections, with:  
121<sup>st</sup> and 122<sup>nd</sup> Telegraph Company;  
102<sup>nd</sup> Radio Company;  
20<sup>th</sup> mobile pigeon coop.  
19<sup>th</sup> Truck-mounted workshop for connecting materials  
88<sup>th</sup> searchlight section.

##### *Chemists.*

16<sup>th</sup> chemical troops Company.

##### *M.V.S.N..*

Regimental Grouping CC.NN. «3 Cennaio» (Cmdr Lgt. Ceno Filippo Diamanti) with:  
Battalion Group CC.NN. «Tagliamento» (Cmdr Consul Nicolò Nicchiarelli) (2), with:

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(1) Transferred from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Grouping of Corps on July 26, 1942.

(2) From the autumn 1942, Consul Domenico Mittica.

LXIII and LXXIX Bn. CC.NN .;  
LXIII Bn. accompanying weapons (of the Army):  
Battalion Group CC.NN. «Montebello» (Cmdr Consul Italo Vianini) with:  
VI and XXX Bn. CC.NN .;  
XII Bn. CC.NN. accompanying weapons.

#### SERVICES

*of Health:*

14<sup>th</sup> Health Section.  
1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Radiological ambulance.  
14<sup>th</sup> Dental ambulance.  
25<sup>th</sup> Disinfection section.  
Field Hospitals: 46<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup>, 89<sup>th</sup>, 90<sup>th</sup>, 117<sup>th</sup>, 148<sup>th</sup>, 159<sup>th</sup>, 578<sup>th</sup>, 825<sup>th</sup>, 826<sup>th</sup>, 836<sup>th</sup>, 874<sup>th</sup>.  
Surgical units: 20<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 52<sup>nd</sup>.

*of Commissariat:*

87<sup>th</sup> Subsistence Section.

*Transportation:*

27<sup>th</sup> Heavy Truck Unit (with 4 Sections).  
228<sup>th</sup> Mixed Truck Unit (with 4 sections of which: a mixed, an ambulance and two tanker trucks).  
1st and 2nd Author Special Section (for transport Grouping CC.NN.).  
185<sup>th</sup> and 190<sup>th</sup> Heavy Goods Section (each with two Sections).  
82<sup>nd</sup> Train Unit.

*Automotive:*

15<sup>th</sup> Heavy mobile workshop.

*Recovery:*

5<sup>th</sup> recoveries Company.

#### “PASUBIO” SEMI-MOTORIZED DIVISION (9th)

#### COMMAND

Commander: Gen. Of Div. Vittorio Giovanelli (1).  
Chief of G.S: Lt. Col. Umberto Ricca (2).

#### HEADQUARTERS

25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Motorized Carabinieri Section.  
9<sup>th</sup> Automotive Unit for Div. Cmd.

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(1) From December 4, 1942, Gen. D. Guido BoseHi.

(2) Until October 31, 1942. From November 1, 1942, Lt. Col. Gianfilippo Cangini.



91<sup>st</sup> Fuel Section.  
9<sup>th</sup> Road Rescue Unit.  
8<sup>th</sup> Road Movement Unit.  
83<sup>rd</sup> Military Post Office.

### INFANTRY

Infantry Div. Commander: Gen. of Bd. Roberto Olmi (1).  
79<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt. "Roma" (Cmdr. Col. Rocco Blasioli) (2) with:  
    Cmd and Cmd co. of Regt.;  
    81 mm. mortars Co.;  
    65/17 acc. cannons. Battery;  
    Battalion. (I, II, III), each with:  
        Cmd and Cmd co. of Bn.;  
        three rifles co.;  
        acc. arms Co. (machine guns and mortars of 81).  
80th Inf. Regt. "Roma" (Cmdr. Col. i.g.s. G. B. Casassa) with:  
    Cmd and Cmd co. of Regt.;  
    81 mm. mortars Co.;  
    65/17 acc. cannons. Battery;  
    Battalion. (I, II, III), each with:  
        Cmd and Cmd co. of Bn.;  
        three rifles co.;  
        acc. arms Co. (machine guns and mortars of 81).  
V and IX Divisional mortars Battalion (of 81).  
9<sup>th</sup> and 141<sup>st</sup> A/T Company of 47/ 32 cannon.

### ARTILLERY

8<sup>th</sup> Motorized Regt. (Cmdr Col. Alfredo Reginella) with:  
    Cmd and Cmd unit of the Regt.;  
    I motorized group of 100/17 howitzer;  
    I and II Motorized group 75/27 cannons; Ammunition and food unit.  
73<sup>rd</sup> A/T Cannon battery of 75/39 (6 pieces)  
85<sup>th</sup> and 309<sup>th</sup> Anti-aircraft Battery with 20 mm.

### ENGINEERS

30<sup>th</sup> Company of artisans.  
9<sup>th</sup> Company telegraph and radio-telegraph.  
95<sup>th</sup> Searchlight section.

### SERVICES

*of Health:*  
5<sup>th</sup> Health Section.

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(1) Until September 16, 1942. From October 8, 1942 Gen. of Bd. Davide Borghini.  
(2) Until October 11 1942. From October 12, 1942 Col. Armando Mazzocchi.

*of Commissariat:*

11<sup>th</sup> Subsistence Section.

*Transportation:*

9<sup>th</sup> Workshop mod. 37.

“TORINO” SEMI-MOTORIZED DIVISION (52<sup>nd</sup>)

COMMAND

Commander: Gen. D. Roberto Lerici.

Chief of G.S: Maj. Umberto Turrini.

HEADQUARTERS

56<sup>th</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> Motorized Carabinieri Section.

52<sup>nd</sup> Automotive Unit for Div. Cmd..

52<sup>nd</sup> Fuel section.

52<sup>nd</sup> Road Rescue Unit.

5<sup>th</sup> Road Movement Unit.

152<sup>nd</sup> Military Post Office.

INFANTRY

Infantry Div. Commander: Gen. of Bd. Ottorino Schreiber (1).

81<sup>st</sup> Inf. Regt. “Torino” (Col. Biagio Santini) with:

Cmd and Cmd co. of Regt.;

81 mm. mortars co.;

47/32 Support Weapons co.;

Battalion. (I, II, III), each with:

Cmd and Cmd co. of Bn.;

three rifle co.;

Support Weapons co. (machine guns and mortars of 81).

82<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Regt. “Torino” (Col. Evaristo Fioravanti) with:

Cmd and Cmd co. of Regt.;

81 mm. mortars co.;

47/32 Support Weapons co.;

Battalion. (I, II, III), each with:

Cmd and Cmd co. of Bn.;

three rifle co.;

Support Weapons co. (machine guns and mortars of 81).

XXVI and LII Divisional mortars Battalion (of 81).

52<sup>nd</sup> and 171<sup>st</sup> A/T cannons Company of 47/32.

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(1) Until October 25, 1942. From October 25, 1942 Gen. of Bd. Cesare Rossi.

## ARTILLERY

52<sup>nd</sup> Motorized Regt. Group (Col. Giuseppe Ghiringhelli) with:  
    Cmd and Cmd unit of the Regt.;  
    I motorized group of 100/17 howitzers;  
    II and III Motorized group 75/27 cannons;  
    Ammunition and food unit.  
352<sup>nd</sup> and 361<sup>st</sup> A/A Battery with 20 mm cannons  
74<sup>th</sup> A/T Battery, cannons of 75/39.

## ENGINEERS

57<sup>th</sup> Company of artisans  
52<sup>nd</sup> Company telegraphists and radiotelegraphists.  
69<sup>th</sup> Searchlight section.

## SERVICES

*of Health:*  
52<sup>nd</sup> Section of Health.  
*of Commissariat:*  
52<sup>nd</sup> Subsistence Section.  
*Transportation:*  
52<sup>nd</sup> Workshop Mod. 37.

3<sup>rd</sup> CELERE DIVISION “PRINCIPE AMEDEO DUCA D'AOSTA”

## COMMAND

Commander: Gen. of Div. Mario Marazzani (1).  
Vice Cmdr: Gen. Of Bd. Carlo Lombardi (2).  
Chief of G.S.: Col. Dandolo Battaglini.

## HEADQUARTERS

355<sup>th</sup> and 356<sup>th</sup> Section Celere Carabinieri.  
3<sup>rd</sup> Automotive unit.  
7<sup>th</sup> road movement unit.  
40<sup>th</sup> Military Post Office.

## INFANTRY

3<sup>rd</sup> Regt. Bersaglieri (Col. Aminto Carretto) (3) with:  
    Cmd and Cmd unit of the Regt.;  
    three Bn. Bersaglieri transportable (XVIII, XX, XXV).

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(1) Until November 1, 1942. From November 3, 1942, Gen. of Div. Ettore de Blasio. .  
(2) From December 13, 1942, Gen. of Bd. Antonio Luridiana.  
(3) Until 2 August 1942. From 4 August, Col. Ercole Felici.

6<sup>th</sup> Regt. Bersaglieri (Col. Umberto Salvatores) (1) with:  
    Cmd and Cmd Co. of the Regt .;  
    three Bn. Bersaglieri transportable (VI, XIII, XIX).  
XLVII Battalion Bersaglieri motorcyclists with three companies.  
LXVII Battalion Bersaglieri armored with two co. L/6 tanks.  
IC Divisional Mortar Battalion (of 81).  
172<sup>nd</sup>, 173<sup>rd</sup>, 272<sup>nd</sup> A/T cannon Company of 47/32.  
XIII Cavalry Group of Alessandria with two sernov squadrons of 47 32.

#### ARTILLERY

120<sup>th</sup> Motorized Regt. Group (Lt. Col. Ugo de Simone) with:  
    Cmd and Cmd unit of the Regt .;  
    I 100/17 howitzer group with three batteries;  
    II, III 75/27 cannon group with three batteries;  
    Regimental Ammunition and food Unit.  
93<sup>rd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> A/A Motorized Battery of 20 mm.  
75<sup>th</sup> A/T cannons Battery of 75/39 (6 pieces).

#### ENGINEERS

105<sup>th</sup> Company of artisans.  
103<sup>rd</sup> Telegraphist and Radio Company.

#### SERVICES

*of Health:*  
73<sup>rd</sup> Health Section.  
*of Commissariat:*  
93<sup>rd</sup> Subsistence Section.  
*Transportation:*  
XIV Heavy Truck Group with 4 truck units (218<sup>th</sup> and 219<sup>th</sup> Arp., 122<sup>nd</sup> Arl., 213<sup>th</sup> Arm.).  
3<sup>rd</sup> Workshop Mod. 37.

#### ALPINE ARMY BODY

#### COMMAND

Commander: Gen. of Corps Gabriele Nasci.  
Chief of G.S: Col. Giulio Martinat.  
Cmdr. of Artillery: Gen. of Bd. Carlo Filippi.  
Cmdr of Engineers: Gen of Bd. Cesare Tamassia.

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(1) Until October 22, 1942. From October 22, 1942, Col. Mario Carloni.

## HEADQUARTERS

422<sup>nd</sup> Alpine Section Carabinieri and 425<sup>th</sup> Alpine Section Carabinieri mixed.  
27<sup>th</sup> Topocartographic section.  
20<sup>th</sup> Photographic section.  
20<sup>th</sup> Telephone section.  
108<sup>th</sup> Military Post Office.  
Vehicle unit for Alpine Corps.

## DIRECTLY DEPENDENT UNITS

*Artillery* (Cmdr Col. Guglielmo Maj).  
11<sup>th</sup> Artillery Grouping of Corps with:  
LI, LII, LIII Cannon group of 105/32;  
CXVII Group of 149/13 howitzers.  
11<sup>th</sup> Unit of artillery specialists.  
39<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> A/A battery of 20 mm.

### *Engineers.*

I Battalion artisans (with three companies).  
IX Mixed Battalion (a telegraph company, a radio company, a searchlight company).  
XXX Battalion sapper engineers.  
21<sup>st</sup> Repair materials workshop for connections.  
19<sup>th</sup> Mobile pigeon coop.

### *Chemists.*

1st Chemical Company.

## SERVICES

### *of Health:*

307<sup>th</sup> Alpine Health Section.  
7<sup>th</sup> Dental ambulance.  
Field Hospitals: 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 466<sup>th</sup>, 467<sup>th</sup>, 483<sup>rd</sup>, 484<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> Disinfection Section.

### *of Commissariat:*

113<sup>th</sup> Alpine Section of Commissariat.

### *Transportation:*

200<sup>th</sup> Mixed Truck Unit (with two heavy sections, one light and one tanker).

### *Automotive:*

57<sup>th</sup> Heavy mobile workshop.

### *Recovery:*

6<sup>th</sup> Recovery Company.

ALPINE DIVISION "TRIDENTINA" (2<sup>nd</sup>)

COMMAND

Commander: Gen. of Bd. Luigi Reverberi.  
Chief of G.S: Maj. Alessandro Ambrosiani.

HEADQUARTERS

402<sup>nd</sup> and 417<sup>th</sup> Carabinieri mountain section.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vehicle unit for the Alpine Division.  
201<sup>st</sup> Military Post Office.

INFANTRY

5<sup>th</sup> Regt. Alpine (Col. Giuseppe Adami) with:  
  Cmd and Cmd Co. of the Regt .;  
  three Bn. Alpine: "Morbegno", "Tirano", "Edolo", each with:  
    cmd. co, three co. alpine, one co. accompanying weapons;  
  5<sup>th</sup> Alpine Health Section;  
  618<sup>th</sup> Alpine Field Hospital;  
  5<sup>th</sup> Support Group;  
  25<sup>th</sup> baggage train Section.  
6<sup>th</sup> Regt. Alpine (Col. Paolo Signorini) with:  
  Cmd and Cmd Co. of the Regt .;  
  three Bn. Alpine: "Vestone", "Val Chiese", "Verona", each one with:  
    cmd. co, three co. alpine, one co. accompanying weapons;  
  6<sup>th</sup> Alpine Health Section;  
  621<sup>st</sup> Alpine Field Hospital;  
  6<sup>th</sup> Subsidy unit;  
  26<sup>th</sup> baggage train Section.  
82<sup>nd</sup> and 216<sup>th</sup> Alpine A/T cannon Company of 47/32.

ARTILLERY

2nd Alpine Regt. Group (Col. Federico Moro) with:  
  Cmd and Cmd unit of the Regt.;  
  Group "Bergamo" and Group "Vicenza", each with:  
    three bty. howitzers of 75/13 and Ammunition and Food unit;  
  Group "Val Camonica" with:  
    two bty. 105/11 howitzers and Ammunition and Food unit.  
56<sup>th</sup> and 59<sup>th</sup> A/A Battery of 20 mm.  
76<sup>th</sup> A/T cannons Battery of 75/39 (6 pieces).

ENGINEERS

II Bn. mixed engineers with:  
  co. artisans;  
  co. telegraphists and radio;  
  searchlight section.

## SERVICES

### *of Health:*

302<sup>nd</sup> Alpine Health Section.

Field Hospitals: 619<sup>th</sup>, 620<sup>th</sup>, 622<sup>nd</sup>, 623<sup>rd</sup>.

### *of Commissariat:*

110<sup>th</sup> Subsistence Section.

### *Transportation:*

206<sup>th</sup> Mixed Truck Unit (with 5 sections and a tanker truck section).

5<sup>th</sup> [Baggage] Train Unit.

## ALPINA DIVISION "JULIA" (3<sup>rd</sup>)

### COMMAND

Commander: Gen. of Bd. Umberto Ricagno.

Chief of G.S: Col. Giuseppe Molinari.

### HEADQUARTERS

415<sup>th</sup> and 416<sup>th</sup> Carabinieri mountain section.

3<sup>rd</sup> Vehicle Unit for the Alpine Division.

202<sup>nd</sup> Military Post Office.

### INFANTRY

8<sup>th</sup> Regt. Alpine (Col. Armando Cimolino) with:

Cmd and Cmd Co. of the Regt.;

three Bn. Alpine: "Tolmezzo", "Gemona", "Cividale", each with:

Cmd Co., three alpine Co., a accompanying weapons Co.;

308<sup>th</sup> Alpine Health Section;

814<sup>th</sup> Alpine Field Hospital;

8<sup>th</sup> Subsistence Unit;

28<sup>th</sup> [Baggage] Train Section.

9<sup>th</sup> Regt. Alpine (Col. Fausto Lavizzari) with:

Cmd and Cmd Co. of the Regt.;

three Bn. Alpine: "Vicenza", "L'Aquila", "Val Cismon", each with:

Cmd Co., three alpine Co., a accompanying weapons Co.;

309<sup>th</sup> Alpine Health Section;

630<sup>th</sup> Alpine Field Hospital;

9<sup>th</sup> Subsistence Unit;

29<sup>th</sup> [Baggage] Train Section.

41<sup>st</sup> and 83<sup>rd</sup> Alpine A/T cannon Company of 47/32.

## ARTILLERY

3<sup>rd</sup> Rgt. Group Alpine (Col. Pietro Gay) with:  
Cmd and Cmd Unit of the Regt.;  
Groups “Conegliano” and “Udine”, each with:  
three bty. 75/13 howitzers and the Ammunition and Foods Unit;  
Val Piave Group with:  
two bty. 105/11 howitzers and Ammunition and Food Unit.  
45<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> A/A Battery of 20 mm.  
77<sup>th</sup> Battery A/T cannons of 75/39 (6 pieces).

## ENGINEERS

III Bn. mixed Engineers with:  
co. artisans;  
co. telegraphists and Radio;  
Searchlight section.

## SERVICES

*of Health:*  
303<sup>rd</sup> Alpine Health Section;  
Field Hospitals: 628<sup>th</sup>, 629<sup>th</sup>, 633<sup>rd</sup>, 813<sup>th</sup>.  
*of Commissariat:*  
111<sup>th</sup> Subsistence Section.  
*Transportation:*  
207<sup>th</sup> Mixed Truck Unit (with 5 sections and a tanker truck section).  
8<sup>th</sup> [Baggage] Train Unit.

## ALPINA DIVISION “CUNEENSE” (4<sup>th</sup>)

### COMMAND

Commander: Gen. of Div. Emilio Battisti.  
Chief of G.S.: Lt. Col. Lorenzo Navone.

### HEADQUARTERS

413<sup>th</sup> and 414<sup>th</sup> Carabinieri mountain section.  
4<sup>th</sup> Vehicle Unit for Alpine Division Cmd.  
203<sup>rd</sup> Military Post Office.

## INFANTRY

1<sup>st</sup> Regt. Alpine (Col. Luigi Manfredi) with:  
Cmd and Cmd Co. of the Regt.;  
three Bn. Alpine: “Ceva”, “Pieve di Teco”, “Mondavi”, each with:



a Cmd. Co., three Co. alpine, a accompanying weapons Co.;  
1<sup>st</sup> Alpine Health Section;  
612<sup>th</sup> Alpine Field Hospital;  
1<sup>st</sup> Subsistence Unit;  
21<sup>st</sup> [Baggage] Train Section.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Regt. Alpine (Col. Luigi Scrimin) with:  
Cmd and Cmd. Co. of the Regt.;  
three Bn. Alpine: "Borgo S. Dalmazzo", "Dronero", "Saluzzo", each with:  
a Cmd. Co., three Co. alpine, a accompanying weapons Co.;  
2<sup>nd</sup> Alpine Health Section;  
615<sup>th</sup> Alpine Field Hospital;  
2<sup>nd</sup> Subsistence Unit;  
22<sup>nd</sup> [Baggage] Train Section.  
14<sup>th</sup> and 84<sup>th</sup> Alpine A/T cannon Company of 47/32.

### ARTILLERY

4<sup>th</sup> A. Regt. Alpine (Col. Enrico Orlandi) with:  
Cmd and Cmd Co. Unit of the Rgt.;  
Groups "Pinerolo" and "Mondovì" each with:  
three bty. 75/13 howitzers and the Ammunition and Food Unit;  
Group "Val Pa" with:  
two bty. howitzers of 105/11 and Ammunition and Food Unit.  
64<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> A/A Battery of 20 mm.  
78<sup>th</sup> A/T cannons Battery of 75/39 (6 pieces).

### ENGINEERS

IV Bn. mixed Engineers with:  
artisans Co.;  
telegraphists and radio Co.;  
Searchlight section.

### SERVICES

*of Health:*  
306<sup>th</sup> Alpine Health Section.  
Field hospitals: 613<sup>th</sup>, 614<sup>th</sup>, 616<sup>th</sup>, 617<sup>th</sup>.  
*of Commissariat:*  
107<sup>th</sup> Subsistence Section.  
*Transportation:*  
201<sup>st</sup> Mixed Truck Unit (with 5 sections and a tanker truck section).  
2<sup>nd</sup> [Baggage] Train Unit.

INFANTRY DIVISION "VICENZA" (156<sup>th</sup>).

COMMAND

Commander: Gen. of Bd. i.g.s. Etelvoldo Pascolini.  
Chief of G.S: Lt. Col. Agostino Uberti,

HEADQUARTERS

136<sup>th</sup> and 137<sup>th</sup> Mixed section Carabinieri.  
156<sup>th</sup> Military Post Office.

POLICE

XXVI Bn. Carabinieri (with two companies).

INFANTRY

277<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt. (Cmdr. Col. Giulio Cesare Salvi) with:  
Command and Regt. Command Co.;  
Mortar Company of 81;  
Accompanying cannons Company of 47/32;  
Battalions (I, II, III), each with:  
Command and Bn. Command Co.;  
three rifle companies;  
Accompanying weapons company (machine guns and mortars).  
278<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt. (Cmdr Col. Gaetano Romeres) with:  
Command and Regt. Command Co.;  
Mortar Company of 81;  
Accompanying cannons Company of 47/32;  
Battalions (I, II, III), each with:  
Command and Bn. Command Co.;  
three rifle companies;  
Accompanying weapons company (machine guns and mortars).  
CLVI Machine-gun battalion.  
256<sup>th</sup> Anti-tank Company of 47/32.

ENGINEERS

Mixed Battalion on:  
156<sup>th</sup> artisans co.;  
256<sup>th</sup> radio-telegraph co..

SERVICES

*of Health:*  
156<sup>th</sup> Health Section.  
161<sup>st</sup> and 162<sup>nd</sup> Field Hospitals.

*of Commissariat:*

156<sup>th</sup> Subsistence Section.

256<sup>th</sup> Baker team with ovens.

*Transportation:*

1121<sup>st</sup> Mixed Truck Section.

DIRECTLY DEPENDENT UNITS  
OF THE 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY COMMAND

POLICE

373<sup>rd</sup> Carabinieri horse mounted section.

175<sup>th</sup> Carabinieri motorized section.

236<sup>th</sup>, 237<sup>th</sup>, 238<sup>th</sup>, 239<sup>th</sup>, 243<sup>rd</sup>, 244<sup>th</sup>, 245<sup>th</sup>, 283<sup>rd</sup> Mixed section of the Carabinieri.

INFANTRY

CIX Truck-mounted machine-gun battalion.

Alpine skiers "Monte Cervino" battalion (with three companies and two machine-gun platoons).

CAVALRY

Regimental Group of Cavalry (Cmdr. Gen. of Bd. Guglielmo Barbò of Casal Morano):

    "Savoia Cavalleria" Regiment (Cmdr. Col. Alessandro Bettoni Cazzago):

    Command and Regiment Command Squadron;

        I and II Squadron Group with:

        Command and two Cavalry squadrons;

        5<sup>th</sup> machine-gunner Squadron.

    "Lancieri di Novara" Regiment (Cmdr. Col. Carlo Pagliano):

    Command and Squadron Regiment Command;

        I and II Squadron Group with:

        Command and two Cavalry squadrons;

        5<sup>th</sup> machine-gunners Squadron.

ARTILLERY

9<sup>th</sup> Regimental Artillery Grouping of the Army with Groups:

    XXIV and L cannons of 149/28;

    XXXI, XXXII, XXXIV 149/40 cannons;

    LXXIII Howitzer of 210/22.

Horse Artillery Regiment (Cmdr Col. Domenico Montella) with:

    Command and Regimental Cmd Unit;

    I, II, III Group with two batteries horse drawn 75/27 mode 1912 cannon;

    Regimental Ammunition and food Unit.

201<sup>st</sup> Motorized Artillery Regiment (Cmdr. Col. Enrico Altavilla) with:  
Command and Regimental Cmd Unit;  
I, II, III Groups each with three batteries of 75/32 cannon.  
4<sup>th</sup> Anti-aircraft artillery grouping (Cmdr Col. Giuseppe di Martino) with:  
IV and XIX Group each with two batteries 75/46 cannon;  
XXXVI, XXXVII, XXXVIII Group each with three 75/46 mm. cannon batteries.  
14<sup>th</sup> Artillery specialists unit.  
86<sup>th</sup> Searchlight section.  
31<sup>st</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>, 42<sup>nd</sup>, 65<sup>th</sup> A/A Batteries of 20 mm.

#### ENGINEERS

XXVI artisans Battalion.  
5<sup>th</sup> Regimental Grouping of transmissions with:  
I Telegraph Battalion (with four companies);  
V Mixed Battalion (with a mixed links company and a mixed specialists company);  
156<sup>th</sup> radio-telegraph Company.  
8<sup>th</sup> mobile pigeon coop.  
8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> water companies.  
6<sup>th</sup> Fire Company.  
I, II, IX, XXXIV bridging Battalions.  
101<sup>st</sup> Ferries company.  
IX and X railwaymen Battalion.  
XVIII workers Battalion (with four companies).  
XL workers Battalion (with three companies).

#### CHEMICAL

8<sup>th</sup> Army Chemical Grouping with:  
I and IV Chemical Battalion.

#### AVIATION

LXXI Group of observation for the Army with Squadrons 38<sup>th</sup> and 116<sup>th</sup>.  
XXI Terrestrial fighter group with Squadrons 356<sup>th</sup>, 361<sup>st</sup>, 382<sup>nd</sup>, 386<sup>th</sup>.

#### CROATIAN LEGION

with:  
Legion Command;  
Rifle battalion;  
Mortar company of 81;  
A/T Company with 47/32 guns.

*QUARTERMASTER OF THE 8<sup>TH</sup> ARMY*

Intendant: Gen. of Bd. Carlo Biglino.

Chief of the G.S.: Lt. Col. Luigi De Michelis.

HEALTH

Health Directorate. Director: Col. med. Dr. Nicola Maugeri.

8<sup>th</sup> Health Warehouse.

Field Hospitals: 25<sup>th</sup>, 32<sup>nd</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>, 44<sup>th</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup>, 64<sup>th</sup>, 163<sup>rd</sup>, 164<sup>th</sup>, 235<sup>th</sup>, 238<sup>th</sup>, 239<sup>th</sup>, 256<sup>th</sup>, 257<sup>th</sup>, 820<sup>th</sup>, 827<sup>th</sup>, 828<sup>th</sup>, 829<sup>th</sup>, 830<sup>th</sup>, 831<sup>st</sup>, 832<sup>nd</sup>, 837<sup>th</sup>, 873<sup>rd</sup>, 249<sup>th</sup>, 250<sup>th</sup>, 251<sup>st</sup>, 211<sup>th</sup>, 201<sup>st</sup>, 202<sup>nd</sup>, 203<sup>rd</sup>, 213<sup>th</sup>, 512<sup>th</sup>, 513<sup>th</sup>, 514<sup>th</sup>, 515<sup>th</sup>.

Reserve Hospitals: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>.

Convalescents: 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Gassed Reclamation Sections: 2<sup>nd</sup> and 104<sup>th</sup>.

Disinfection Sections: 22<sup>nd</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>.

Chemical - Bacteriological - Toxicological Laboratories.

Hospital trains:

RE: 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 34<sup>th</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup>, 36<sup>th</sup>, 41<sup>st</sup>;

CRI: 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>;

SMOM: 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>.

COMMISSARIAT

Commissariat management. Director: Col. Commiss. Felice Pirro.

8<sup>th</sup> Warehouse Food and A-vein.

8<sup>th</sup> Forage, Straw and Wood Warehouse.

8<sup>th</sup> Warehouse Clothing and Equipment.

Subsection Sections: 57<sup>th</sup>, 84<sup>th</sup>, 96<sup>th</sup>, 97<sup>th</sup>.

1<sup>st</sup> Macellai Company.

Baker Sections with rotary ovens: 28<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>.

Bakers teams with rotary ovens: 23<sup>rd</sup>, 104<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 49<sup>th</sup>, 53<sup>rd</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 65<sup>th</sup>, 59<sup>th</sup>, 61<sup>st</sup>, 62<sup>nd</sup>, 63<sup>rd</sup>.

Bakers section with trackable ovens: 175<sup>th</sup>.

Bakers sections without moving ovens: 166<sup>th</sup>, 169<sup>th</sup>, 171<sup>st</sup>, 176<sup>th</sup>, 181<sup>st</sup>, 191<sup>st</sup>.

1<sup>st</sup> mixed Bakers Squad.

ADMINISTRATION

Directorate of Administration.

ARTILLERY

Artillery Directorate. Director: Col. Giovanni Bottari,

8<sup>th</sup> Artillery Warehouse.

ENGINEERS

Directorate of the Engineers. Director: Col. Vincenzo Caniglia.

8<sup>th</sup> Engineers Warehouse.

33<sup>rd</sup> artisans Engineers Company.

#### CHEMIST

Chemical Directorate. Director: Maj. Giovanni Rosa.  
8<sup>th</sup> Chemical Warehouse.  
Field chemical laboratory.

#### HORSE AND VETERINARY

Directorate of Horse and Veterinary.  
8<sup>th</sup> Veterinary and Farrier Warehouse.  
8<sup>th</sup> draft animal Carriage and harnesses park.  
Draft animal infirmaries: 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 120<sup>th</sup>, 121<sup>st</sup>.

#### TRANSPORT

Transportation Directorate. Director: Lt. Col. G.S. Antonio Gualano.  
VI and XXVI Road Movement Battalion (each with three companies and a roadside assistance unit).  
6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> militia Century of the road.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Truck Grouping of the Army (Cmdr. Col. Ginesio Ninchi) with:  
II mixed Truck Grouping with:  
    two heavy Truck units;  
    an ambulance unit;  
    a tanker units;  
    a garage.  
XXIX Heavy Truck group with:  
    three heavy Truck groups;  
    a mixed Truck units;  
    two car repair shops;  
    two hundred trailers;  
    two hundred livestock transport trailers.  
LI Heavy Truck group with:  
    four heavy Truck units;  
    two car repair shops.  
46<sup>th</sup> Workshop.  
8<sup>th</sup> roadside assistance unit.  
7<sup>th</sup> Truck Grouping of the Army (Cmdr Col. Achille Paolini) with:  
XVIII Heavy Truck group with:  
    four heavy Truck units.  
XXX Heavy Truck group with:  
    three heavy Truck units;  
    an ambulances unit.  
7<sup>th</sup> Workshop.  
8<sup>th</sup> A Truck Grouping of the Army with:  
    LVII Heavy Truck group with:  
        four Heavy Truck units.  
    LVIII Heavy Truck with:  
        four Heavy Truck units.  
8<sup>th</sup> Workshop.

10<sup>th</sup> Truck Group of the Army (Cmdr. Col. Giuseppe Papi) with:

LX Heavy truck group with:

four heavy truck units.

LXI Heavy truck group with:

four truck units.

10<sup>th</sup> Workshop.

350<sup>th</sup> Heavy Truck unit.

#### AUTOMOTIVE

Automotive management.

6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> car park.

Six car group workshops.

Two FIAT special workshops.

#### STAGES

Directorate of the stages. Director: Gen. of Bd. Giuseppe Musinu.

Three Main Stage Controls.

Six Secondary Stage Controls.

Eleven Special Stage Controls.

Four Main Stage Offices.

CCXV, CCXVII, CCXLVII, CDXLI Mobile Territorial Bn. (with four companies).

CCXVIII, CDL, CDLIV Mobile Territorial Bn. (with three companies).

63<sup>rd</sup> Garrison Company.

CCIX, CDXLIX, CDLI, CDLII, CDLIII, CDLV, CDLVI, CDLVII Artillery Groups without transport  
(each with four batteries).

#### POSTAL AND TELEGRAPHIC

Postal and Telegraph Director. Director: Maj. (Milit.) Angelo Zocchi.

Military Post Office: 6<sup>th</sup>, 102<sup>nd</sup>, 122<sup>nd</sup>, 126<sup>th</sup>, 127<sup>th</sup>, 128<sup>th</sup>, 129<sup>th</sup>.

#### RECOVERY

Recovery Directorate. Director: Col. Ferdinando Graziani (1).

7<sup>th</sup> Recovery Company.

#### ROADS

Road Directorate. Director: Maj. Aleramo Perdomo.

#### WAR ECONOMY

Directorate for War Economics.

#### TIMBERS

Wood management. Directorate: Sen. M.F. O. Vecchioli.

91<sup>st</sup> and 131<sup>st</sup> Forestry Company.

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(1) From December 1942 Col. Nicola Ruffo.

DISTRIBUTION OF CALIBERS AND USES  
OF THE CANNONS OF THE 8<sup>TH</sup> ARMY

*Directly dependent on the Army Command:*

Cal. 20 A/A	32 (4 batteries)	] 84
Cal. 75/46 A/A	52 (2 groups with 2 bty., 3 gr. with 3 bty.)	
Cal. 75/32 A/T	36 (3 groups of 3 btys of 2010 Regt.)	
Cal. 75/27 mode 1912	24 (3 groups of 2 btys of the Regt. Art. Cav.)	
Cal. 149/28	24 (2 groups of 3 bty.)	
Cal. 149/40	36 (3 groups of 3 bty.)	
Cal. 210/22	<u>12</u> (1 group of 3 bty.)	
	216 (50 batteries)	

*Directly dependent on the II Corps Command:*

Cal. 20 A/A	16 (2 batteries)
Cal. 105/28	24 (2 groups of 3 bty.)
Cal. 149/13	<u>24</u> (2 groups of 3 bty.)
	64 (14 batteries)

Divisions: "Sjorzesca" and "Cossieria" each with:

Cal. 20 A/A.	16 (2 batteries)
Cal. 75/39 A/T	6 (1 battery)
Cal. 65/17 accomp.	8 (2 batteries)
Cal. 75/18	24 (2 groups of 3 bty.)
Cal. 105/28	<u>12</u> (1 group of 3 bty.)
	66 (14 batteries)

Division "Ravenna":

Cal. 20 A/A.	16 (2 batteries)
Cal. 75/39 A/T.	6 (1 battery)
Cal. 65/17 accomp.	4 (1 batteries)
Cal. 75/18	24 (2 groups of 3 bty.)
Cal. 105/28	<u>12</u> (1 Group of 3 bty.)
	62 (13 batteries)

*Summary II Army Corps*

258 guns (55 batteries)



## Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Page 630

### *Directly dependent on the Command XXXV C.A. - CSIR:*

Cal. 20 A/A.	16 (2 batteries)
Cal. 105/32	36 (3 groups of 3 bty.).
Cal. 149/13	<u>12</u> (1 group of 3 btys)
	64 (14 batteries)

### *“Pasubio” Division:*

Cal. 20 A/A.	16 (2 batteries)
Cal. 75/39 A/T	6 (1 battery)
Cai. 65/17 accomp.	8 (2 batteries)
Cal. 75/27 mode 1911	24 (2 groups of 3 bty.)
Cal. 100/17 mode 1914	<u>12</u> (1 group of 3 bty.)
	66 (14 batteries)

### *“Torino” and “3<sup>rd</sup> Celere” Divisions, each:*

Cal. 20 A/A.	16 (2 batteries)
cal. 75/39 A/T	6 (1 battery)
Cal. 75/27 mode 1911	24 (2 groups of 3 bty.)
Cal, 100/17 mode 1914	<u>12</u> (1 group of 3 bty.)
	58 (12 batteries)

*Summary XXXV Corps. – CSIR*  
246 guns (52 batteries)

### *Directly dependent on the Alpine Corps:*

Cal. 20 A/A	16 (2 batteries)
Cal. 105/32	36 (3 groups of 3 bty.)
Cal. 149/13	<u>12</u> (1 group of 3 btys)
	64 (14 batteries)

### *Divisions “Tridentina”, “Julia” and “Cuneense”, Each:*

Cal, 20 A/A	16 (2 batteries)
Cai. 75/39 A/T	6 (1 battery)
Cai. 75/13	24 (2 groups of 3 bty.)
Cal. 105/11	<u>8</u> (Group of 2 bty.)
	54 (11 batteries)

*Summary alpine Corps.*

226 guns (47 batteries)

GENERAL SUMMARY 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY

	Guns	Batteries
Directly units	216	50
II Army Corps	258	55
XXXV Army Corps – CSIR	246	52
Alpine Army Corps	<u>226</u>	<u>47</u>
Total 8 <sup>th</sup> Army	946	204

“In total of 946 artillery guns are not included the 31 pieces of 20 mm of the LXVII armored Bersaglieri battalion, nor the 19 pieces of 47 mm. of the XIII Semoventi group of the cavalrymen of Alexandria”

Document n. 57.

VARIANTS FOR THE CONSTITUTION OF ITALIAN UNITS  
FIGHTING ON THE RUSSIAN FRONT

	CSIR (Formation 1942)	8th Army	%
Men	62,000	229,005	369
Light Machine guns	866	2,657	306
Machine guns	581	1,742	299
Mortars of 81 mm.	189	423	223
Mortars of 45 mm.	292	874	299
Cannons 47/32	108	297	275
Armored vehicles	60	50	- 16
Artillery guns:			
in total	256	946	369
of which:			
small caliber	220	670	304
medium caliber	36	276	766
Anti-aircraft guns	80	276	345
Anti-tank guns	-	90	-
Aircraft	83	66	21
Draft Animals	4,600	25,000	543
Motor vehicles	5,500	16,700	303
Motorcycles	1,550	4,470	288

GENERAL STAFF R. ARMY  
TRAINING OFFICE  
4th Section

Reserved,  
No. 18900 of prot.

P.M. 9, 21 September 1941 – XIX

*Issuing extended up to the regiment commands.*

*Subject:* Procedures for employment on the Russian front

Similarly to what has been done regarding the characteristics of certain offensive procedures adopted by the German troops in Poland and the western front (circular 8900, of 25 October 1940 - XVIII), the first experiences deduced from the development of operations in the East are summarized here.

Therefore, it is not a question of conclusive experiences. To wait for these you would end up never using them or too late.

Our participation in operations in Russia requires everyone to follow, with particular instructive intent, what happens in that theater.

I. - GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIGHT

They can be summarized as follows:

- *vastness* of the theater; *discontinuous fronts*, to an even more accentuated extent than previous campaigns (ie. Poland); *amount* of personnel and resources in the field.

The factors of war: man - machine - space - time are enormously enlarged.

The contingent pre-eminence of one or the other of them may have weighed on the development of operations without harming - on the Germanic side - the unity of concept, command, execution;

- *location of the offensive effort* astride of the most efficient communication routes. The battles so far fought have all the names of places from which these streets pass or radiate such routes;

- *impressive logistic effort* by the attacker.

The principle of logistic - operational connection has had, since the beginning of this campaign, its most difficult and widespread application.

The wear on vehicles has been more pronounced than in previous campaigns. Regardless of the length of the routes and the rhythm of the operations, the same environment could determine serious *surprises* in this regard, whenever the spirit of retirement and the constant care of the material were defective;

- *fierce of the enemy resistance*, even in the most tactically unfavorable circumstances; fact not verified - normally - in previous campaigns.

Although not decisively weighing on the development of operations by the Germanic and allied parties, as these have been and are conducted with *inexorable* continuity, this resistance has nevertheless led to a lower overall speed of action.

## II - GERMAN OFFENSIVE PROCEDURES (1)

### a) *Use of the G.U.*

It was inspired by the principles followed in previous campaigns, but - it is worth repeating - in environmental conditions and in relation to very different forces.

The adversary, on the other hand, seems to have learned well from the reversals of others and his own (Finland).

Localized, as already mentioned, the possibility of determining the break to the areas of good practicability and direct the effort on the few objectives of vital importance for the enemy, the German armored divisions achieved initial success, have not always *been able to fully exploit it*; according to known procedures.

This is due to the fact that the great Soviet units have allowed the German armored units to "pass" on the roads, maintaining the occupation of the areas interposed between the great itineraries, and sometimes blocking the same routes again to the great infantry units that arrive.

The armored divisions have therefore had to renounce a more decisive push in depth and begin, instead, the encirclement of the enemy masses, which infantry divisions engaged frontally; thus the Soviet "pockets" were formed, which, by coordinating action on the front and rear, were fragmented and eventually eliminated.

All this has succeeded, but has imposed a considerable slowdown of the action in depth.

It follows that the rapidity and the continuity of the action in depth are a consequence of the possibility of coordinating the action of the armored G.U. with that of the infantry G.U. behind.

This is mainly due to their different aptitude for a rapid progression forward.

If the Germanic Command could still have the forces necessary to *overcome* the crisis of the *initial detachment* under extremely short times, this is due above all to the perfect training for the march of the infantry (2).

Subsequent stages of 40 - 50 kilometers constitute the *normality*, without affecting the physical condition of the troops, the cohesion of the units, the possibility of a ready employment of them.

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(1) For what is not commented in this circular, see the 8900, already cited.

(2) See the circular S.M.R.E. : of 20 June 1940 - XVIII, (s.n.), on the subject: "Norms for the movement by ordinary way" and n. 1 C.S.M., on 28 July

It is evident that through the *road transport* of the infantry this cooperation would be better achievable, but such a solution can not be adopted beyond a certain limit even for obvious technical-productive reasons.

The Germanic procedure of applying in the strategic as well as tactical field the "center of gravity" of the effort on the points of least enemy resistance led mostly to a fragmentation of the "bags" into other minor, with the consequent fragmentation of the action.

To this the resistance of the Russian units gave a character of particular fury.

This has resulted in the *difficulty* of coordinating these operations and addressing them to the achievement of a unitary purpose. It has been superseded by the *initiative* of the commanders of the units of each grade.

Minor fights also took place in the immediate Germanic backwaters, to stop the activity of enemy detachments, nested in the woods, against marching units and supply columns.

The raiding action was mostly conducted by infantry detachments (battalions reinforced with accompanying weapons and anti-tank).

The security service has assumed particular importance. Vigilance, daring, excellent functioning of the connections were the fundamental elements for the success of these operations.

*b) Employment of important locations by special detachments.*

The constitution of tactical groupings with elements of the various arms, launched even at great distances from the big ones, for the search for contact with the enemy and for allowing troops behind a rapid intervention on the weakest point of the new deployment of the defense, is frequently implemented procedure from the Germans in all recent campaigns.

In the eastern theater, its usefulness was confirmed, especially given the actual value that a prompt and preventive occupation of important locations (bridges or communication nodes) could have on the further development of operations.

These detachments were constituted by the G.U. of first line, normal or special.

Sometimes, as was the case in Riga, an "advanced grouping" was merged, and under single command, detachments of several infantry units, each formed roughly by a truck portable battalion, anti-tank, anti-aircraft, artillery and engineers (all motorized).

A unit formation of this kind, which had the task of occupying two bridges over the Dvina, acquitted it, although in difficult circumstances, pushing 120 km from the big ones.

It should be noted that the action of these detachments is clearly distinct from that of the explorative groups of each G.U.

It could, in essence, identify with that of a motorized vanguard that, with its preliminary actions, allows the bulk to move and act in the most favorable conditions.

The discussions about the opportunity to launch two distinct elements (advanced detachments and exploration groups) would be idle, although considering that more often than not it would be sufficient to reinforce the exploration group to put this in a position to perform, even temporarily, the task occupation of the localities mentioned.

As in any other operational problem, it is ultimately a matter of adapting the instrument to the specific purpose that is to be achieved and to the presumed degree of resistance that must be overcome.

*c) Details on the use of various arms.*

*Infantry.* - It is frequently found in the need to attack organized defensive positions with field work.

The procedures adopted were almost similar to the well-known ones of the end of the world war (procedures to which we have also had recourse, in certain sectors of our front).

This means that there can not be, at least at present, a one hundred percent mechanized war.

Infantry must and must still be able to fight even with the only traditional cooperation of its artillery.

The Germanic battalions generally begin the attack with a brief artillery preparation (20' - 30'), from which they take advantage to close as much as possible.

*Artillery.* - The frequent decentralization to the G.U. the first group of artilleries of the major calibers (in particular the 210), pushed forward with the avant-gardes, and the use of anti-aircraft artillery against terrestrial targets.

Timeliness of intervention and effectiveness of the fire always condition on artillery ration.

There is no advanced or backward alignment that counts, nor specialization that applies against this elementary principle.

*Cavalry.* - The only division existing in the Germanic army has been employed in the classic "protection of an uncovered wing of the deployment " of a group of armies

It acted where the mechanized vehicles would have encountered prohibitive conditions of movement and acted, as always, with an excellent tactical yield, signaling for the length of the steps taken, which enabled it to intervene promptly.

*Engineers.* - shares of this specialties are present, as has already been noted, in all phases of tactical action and with the most advanced elements of each deployment. In this first phase of the campaign, bridges - artisans - sappers competed in contempt of danger and technical ability to eliminate, in the shortest possible time, every obstacle to movement.

*d) Services.*

The operation has been organized exploiting almost exclusively the great vehicle routes and has taken on impressive proportions, given the almost absolute lack of every resource readily usable on the spot.

In this way, real "supply channels" have been created which are also suitable to facilitate security measures against guerrilla warfare and surprise attacks (1).

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(1) See, in analogy, as for the circa 18000 – see chap. VIII - n. 77. pag. 53.

The discipline of the road movement was, as always, perfect. Of particular importance is the systematic use of all return vehicles for evictions (injured and material).

Particularly important was the supply of fuels and tires (whose attrition was enormous), as well as that of recovery.

### III. - DEFENSIVE PROCEDURES OF RUSSIANS

#### e) *Use of fortification.*

Both the defensive border organization and the so-called *Stalin line* presented themselves as a fortification complex of very unequal value in the various sectors. It turned out that real modern permanent works, organized in depth, had been built only in a few sectors, while on the rest, especially in correspondence with large water courses, the defensive organization had a simple field structure, when it did not lack altogether.

In some cases, the Russians resorted to semi-permanent works, largely exploiting large tree trunks, as was widely implemented by the Finns.

As for field work, the Russians have confirmed their traditional attitude to such work. The trenches present themselves mostly as a complex of very narrow excavations, with vertical walls, so that the wagons can pass them without material damage for the defenders. From these trenches, which lend themselves only to the use of rifles and abundant automatic rifles, depart some tunnels that lead to the positions of the machine guns and accompanying weapons. Sometimes the position is defended by an anti-tank ditch with a triangular section, with the wall facing the enemy at a height of about three meters.

#### f) *Conduct of the defense.*

It was based, generally, on these elementary criteria:

- resistance to the bitter end on a certain position;
- successive positions, to be defended with the same obstinacy;
- numerous counterattacks, without saving men;
- counter-offensive actions, conducted with obstinate violence, but with scarce expertise.

Regarding the latter, the prevalent use of armored units is to be noted. With regard to these, it must be remembered that the Soviet command had placed absolute confidence on its armored units. From the light tanks of 2 tons (Tankette) to the heavy ones of 52 tons, at the beginning of the hostilities existed a variety of machines suitable, in the intentions of the command, to all the necessities of the struggle (from the exploration to the breaking of fortified fronts ).

In practice, the yield was much lower than the expected and very serious losses suffered.

Since it is established that some types of tanks (ie. those of medium weight) are technically excellent, well armed and fast, it is certain that they have negatively influenced the performance of these poor *training* and the deficient organization of supplies and recoveries.

## IN CONCLUSION

On the Germanic side, meticulous preparation of the campaign and, in its first phase, ready adaptation of the action procedures to the enemy's combat methods.

The greater ability to "maneuver" in the tactical and strategic fields has compensated - everywhere with success - every temporary and local inferiority of forces - and sometimes also of means - by the attack. This capacity has had its most solid foundation in the best *training* of cadres and troops.

In the end, possessing the technique, the knowledge and the know-how are based on each operational performance.

Initiative and audacity do the rest; within the general framework of the action, each commander, without waiting for orders and without invoking assistance, knows how to pose the contingent problem and solve it,

*On the Russian side*, fierce obstinacy in resisting, served by a very copious material; elementary tactics ranging from the *wall of fire to the guerrilla*.

However, it has been noted on several occasions that the Soviet soldier has a singular skill in the battlefield's fast works (trenches, posts, anti-tank ditches), in the destruction and in the fight against tanks.

Outstanding and unbridgeable inferiorities are, on the other hand, *framing and training*.

The Chief of the Army G.S.  
*Roatta*

Document n. 59.

## ARTILLERY DEPLOYMENT PROVIDED BY THE DIRECTIVES OF THE XXXV ARMY CORPS COMMAND - CSIR ON 9 JULY 1942

*Mass of maneuver North* (with the 111<sup>th</sup> Division of German infantry) deployed in the northeastern area of Debalizewo.

Commander: Colonel Enrico Grimaldi.

III/2<sup>nd</sup> of 105/28

XXIII/2<sup>nd</sup> of 105/28

CIII/2<sup>nd</sup> of 149/13

CXXIV/2<sup>nd</sup> of 149/13



*Maneuver mass South* (with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division).

Commander: Brigadier General Adriano Perrod.

Army Corps Artillery Grouping (to the inside wing of the Celere Division).

Commander: Colonel Mai.

LI/11<sup>th</sup> of 105/32

LII/11<sup>th</sup> of 105/32

LIII/11<sup>th</sup> of 105/32

CXXVII/11<sup>th</sup> of 149/13

CXXIII/2<sup>nd</sup> of 149/13

XXX/9<sup>th</sup> of 149/40

Light Grouping (organic artillery and reinforcement to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division).

Commander: Lt. Col. Ugo De Simone.

I/120<sup>th</sup> of 100/17

II/120<sup>th</sup> of 75/27

III/120<sup>th</sup> of 75/27

III on horseback of 75/27

LXII/30<sup>th</sup> of 105/32

*Furthermore* CSIR deployed:

LX/30<sup>th</sup>, LXI/30<sup>th</sup> of 105/32

I, II, III/201<sup>st</sup> of 75/32

I and II on horseback of 75/27

I/8<sup>th</sup> of 100/17

II/8<sup>th</sup> and III/8<sup>th</sup> of 75/27

Document n. 60.

COMANDO XXXV ARMY CORP (C.S.I.R.)  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

*Secret.*

P.M. 88, on 9 July 1942. XX

No. 7050/Op. of prot.

*Subject:* Guidelines for future operations with the 17<sup>th</sup> German Army.

*To the Command 111<sup>th</sup> Germanic Division*

*To the Pasubio Infantry Division Command*

*To the Torino Infantry Division Command*

*To the Sforzesca Infantry Division Command*

*To the Command 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division "PA.DA."*

*To the Artillery Command of the Corps.*

*To the Engineer Command of the Corps.*

and, for knowledge:

*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command*

*To the 17<sup>th</sup> German Army Command*

*To the XLIX German Army Corps Command*

*To the LII German Army Corps Command*

*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Aviation Command*

At their offices

1. - Our operations between Donez and Don continue to take place favorably; it must be counted that the enemy in the development of action withdraws on a large front starting from the north.
2. - *Tasks of the Army Corps.*  
There are two hypotheses:
  - a) that enemy retreat and then we must immediately keep behind with the combined forces (Celere - Torino - Sforzesca - Pasubio) maintaining contact with him for Fatschtschewka - Iwanowka in the north direction of Sswerdlowsk;
  - b) it is necessary to dislodge the enemy with a forceful action and to this end the orders of this sheet are valid considering that, since the start date can not yet be established, the strengthening of the action will gradually take place.
3. - The XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.), to the disposal of which the 111<sup>th</sup> Germanic division passes, assumes the sector included among the following limits:
  - to the north with the LII Corps: Nikitowka (XXXV Corps) - Luganskoje (XXXV Corps) - heights west Dolgji (XXXV Corps) - Almasnoje (LII Corps) - Sserge (LII Corps) - Tscherkaskoje (LII Corps):
  - to the south with the XLIX Corps: the current one up to Fatschtschewka, then Artema - Petrowenki - Malaja - Nikolajewka heights west Dolgji (XLIX Corps).The Corps of the Army must first conquer the forces of the highlands north of Fatschtschewka (village) and Goroditschtsche and then continue with all their strength in the general direction of Illiria (Pangrazewka) avoiding the industrial districts of the Woroschilowsk area until you reach the Tscherkasskoje - Michailowka - Baschtewtsch front - hill 321 south-east of Artema.  
They act:
  - on its right the XLIX Alpine Corps, which collaborates closely with the XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.) will mass the left wing to conquer the heights that dominate from east to north-east Fatschtschewka;
  - on his left the LII Corps who will mass on his left to conquer the heights north of Tscherkasskoje.
4. - I mean:
  - to assert myself firmly, at first, on the heights that dominate from owest Goroditschtsche and from the south-east the Fatschtschewka station with pincer action departing respectively from the area of Debalizewo - Oktjabrskij and from the zone hill 316.3;

· carry out simultaneous action of the troops connecting the two branches of the pincer to facilitate decisive front action.

5. - The pincer branches will be constituted:

- *to the north*: from the 111<sup>th</sup> Germanic division;
- *to the south*: from the *Celere* and *Torino* divisions.

Consequently, the 111<sup>th</sup> Germanic Division will make mass on its own right, gradually replaced, along the northernmost defensive front, by the *Pasubio* Division. The latter, in turn, will gradually be replaced in current positions by the *Sforza* Division which will soon assume the Sector of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment.

The *Celere* Division will close on its right and similarly the *Torino* Division.

6. - *Methods for the attack.*

Attack targets (map 1:100,000 LG.M.):

- 111<sup>th</sup> Germanic division: heights of 326.2 - 349.1 - 328.5;
- *Celere* division: heights between hill 347.6 and outlet of the Fatschtschewka station and then hill 333.5.

The two divisions will make connection in the area of hill 328.5.

The *Torino* division will act for the director Kurgan Ploskij - hill 310- 317.2 accompanying the movement of the *Celere* division. It will gather in the area of hill 317.2 to then compete with the *Sforzesca* in the rounding up of the Olichowatka basin.

*Reinforcement unit:*

a) *Infantry troops.*

The CC.NN. Group "Tagliamento" and the Croatian Legion already intended to replace the units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri Regt before the action in the line, after the start of the attack will remain in place at my disposal.

b) *Artillery.*

Two medium-sized groupings will be formed, respectively by:

- the north: 2 groups of 105 and 2 groups of 149/13;
- the south: 3 groups of 105, 2 groups of 149/13 and one group 149/40.

They will act:

- the north one in favor of the 111<sup>th</sup> Germanic Division;
- the south in favor of the duo *Celere* and *Torino*.

The III group on horseback returns to the direct dependencies of the *Celere* Division.

The group I/201<sup>st</sup> is made available to the *Torino* Div. who will deploy to the south of Nowaja Orlowka.

7. - *Methods for replacement.*

Direct agreements will be made between divisions concerned on the basis of the following directives:

a) The *Sforzesca* division will ultimately replace the *Pasubio* division in its sector and subsequently expand its front until the current sector limit between the 81<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> infantry Regt..

The elements currently assigned in reinforcement to the *Pasubio* division will remain in place passing under dependency of the *Sforzesca* division. In

night on July 10th the Sforzesca will disengage at least the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry Regt. and III group/8<sup>th</sup> artillery Regt..

b) The *Pasubio* Div. will make immediate agreements with the Germanic 111<sup>th</sup> Div, to replace first with the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry Regt. and artillery regiment and then with the rest of the division the troops in line of the 111<sup>th</sup> Division from the north limit up to the limit of contact Verchne Lozowij - Werghelewsk - Komissarowka to this end, the horse Artillery Regiment is immediately put at the disposal of the *Pasubio* Div. Command with groups I and II which will take over groups I and II/8<sup>th</sup> artillery in the current deployment and will subsequently be available of the Sforzesca Div. The deployment of the *Pasubio* in the new sector will have to start possibly in the night on the 11<sup>th</sup> and consequently since the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> July the cores of the various units tasked with recognizing the deployment to be detected will have to be sent to the 111<sup>th</sup> Division.

c) The German 111<sup>th</sup> Div. will leave the necessary wire connections in place. In the partial and total substitutions of the defensive sectors it is absolutely essential to keep the most important wire connections in place.

The Commander XXXV Corps. Engineers (C.S.I.R.) will settle this question directly with the Commands *Pasubio* - *Torino* and the German 111<sup>th</sup> Div..

d) I reserve the right to specify the date on which responsibility for the defensive sectors was assumed by the *Pasubio* and *Sforzesca* divisions,

e) For guidance:

- at 00:00 hours on the 13<sup>th</sup> the *Sforzesca* division;
- at 00:00 hours on the 14<sup>th</sup> the *Pasubio* division.

#### 8. - *Links*.

The Engineer Command will ensure the network of connections from the headquarters of the Tactical Command according to separate orders.

#### 9. - *Command post*.

For the action, the *Torino* Division Command chooses a Command post in the 81<sup>st</sup> infantry area.

This Command will establish its command headquarters at the current *Torino* Headquarters in Rykowo with main observatory at the Juni Kornmunar pyramid.

*Mark receipt.*

General of the Army Corps  
Commander  
*Giovanni Messe*

Document n. 61.

COMMAND XXXV CORP (C.S.I.R.)  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

*Secret.*

P.M. 88, on 10 July 1942. XX

No. 7141/Op. of prot.

*Subject:* Guidelines for future operations in the case of enemy withdrawal.

*To the "Pasubio" Infantry Division Command*  
*To the "Torino" Infantry Division Command*  
*To the "Sforzesca" Infantry Division Command*  
*To the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division Command "P.A.D.A."*  
*To the Artillery Command of the Corps.*  
*To the Engineer Command of the Corps*  
*and, for knowledge:*  
*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command*  
*To the German 17<sup>th</sup> Army Command*  
*To the German XLIX Corps Command*  
*To the German LII Corps Command*  
*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Aviation Command*

Their offices

It follows the sheet 7050/Op of July 9, 1942 and dissolves the reserve referred to in n. 11.

1. - In the event that the enemy voluntarily withdraws the XXXV Corps (CSIR) must press it and chase it in the general direction north Swerdlowsk for Fatschtschewka and Iwanowka, while on his left the 111<sup>th</sup> Germanic Div. (who in this case remains under the LII Corps) advances for Gorodischtsche - Orechowa in general Krasnodonsky and right the XLIX Corps with direction south Swerdlowsk.
2. - For the accomplishment of this task it is my intention to employ the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* Div. as a general avant-garde for the route sheet which, developing along the railroad from Fatschtschewka to Schtschetowo, continues for the objective, and to follow with the mass of the remaining forces in the maneuvering device which at the moment will be more appropriate.
3. - The following guidelines apply in this regard:
  - a) the *Celere*, *Torino* and *Pasubio* (then *Sforzesca*) divisions interrupt the exploration on their own front to have the immediate sensation of every indication of enemy withdrawal and in this case maintain contact with forces held in the hands; the current contact limits are so prolonged for this purpose:
    - between *Celere* and *Torino*: Nikitino and Fatschtschewka (locality to the *Celere*);

- between *Torino* and *Pasubio* (then *Sforzesca*): course from Bulavin - Balka Jefimiewka - Redkodub station (to the *Torino*);
  - between *Pasubio* (then *Sforzesca*) and 111<sup>th</sup> Germanic divisions: Mogila Leniwaja - Mogila Goroznaja - hill 347.2 (to the *Pasubio*, then *Sforzesca*);
- b) the *Celere* must be ready to move with the mass of its forces at most within 24 hours from the first signal of an enemy withdrawal;
- c) the divisions *Torino*, *Sforzesca* and *Pasubio* gather as soon as possible the orders for the mass of their forces respectively in the Olichowatka – Im. Molotowa areas; north station Bulawin and owest Debalizewo; and by Werchne Losowij and Nowo Grigorjewka.
- Needless to emphasize the higher need to focus as quickly as possible.
4. - In the forward movement the divisions and above all the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* will have to gravitate with the avant-gardes all the spoiling and limiting elements they have for the removal of the minefields and the reconnection of the interruptions.
- For the same purpose the Engineer Command precedes the insertion of the artillery battalion and the units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* and the mass of the Army Corps. I recommend a generous placement of anti-tank weapons on the head and in the body of the columns.
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> *Celere* advancing particularly looks at their right side.

5. - *Acknowledge receipt.*

General of the Army Corps  
Commander  
*Giovanni Messe*

Document n. 62.

GERMAN CONNECTION COMMAND

*Secret!*

23 July 1942

N. 53/42 of prot.  
*To the Command 8<sup>th</sup> Army*  
*Operations Office*

On the part of the Superior Command of the group of armies “A”, the following order was received: the n. 464/42 secret:

1<sup>st</sup> - The 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army must advance as soon as possible - crossing the Donez - towards the Millerowo - Mankowo Kalitwenskaja line, to be later used on the Don side to the South East of Pawlowsk.

2<sup>nd</sup> - To this end - by forced marches - must cross the Donez to the north-east of Woroschilowgrad at the latest on the morning of 26 July and arrive with the fast units, driving via Belowodsk by 27 July 1942 in the area of Kantemirowka, and with the head of the remaining units, on July 30th on the Millerowo - Mankowo Kalitwenskaja line.

3<sup>rd</sup> - The Italian 8<sup>th</sup> Army, crossing with the last units the Donez, comes out of the dependence of the Army Group Ruoff and enters the immediate dependencies of the Army group "A".

Then crossing with the last units the Millerowo - Belowodsk line, passes to the dependencies of the Army group "B" (Starobelsk).

4th - About the procurement follow separate orders.

The head of the German Liaison Command  
*Gyndenfeld*  
Maj. of the G.S.

Document n. 63.

SUPREME COMMAND  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

August 3, 1942. XX

*For General Marras*  
Berlin

No. 22815 / Op. // General Gariboldi informs that on July 25th he commanded Colonel General Staff Hax of the Army Group "B" to expose his intentions on the new deployment and on the tasks that will be entrusted to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army // He deals with the Don from Pawlowsk (excluded) to the Foce del Choper // Three sectors of Army Corps /- / two Italians at wings and one German at the center /-/ two German divisions in reserve // But the Italian Army Corps of the left (II) would have two Italian divisions and one German /;/ the central German Corps (XXIX) two Italian divisions and one German // Italian right-wing division (XXXV) two Italian divisions // General Gariboldi expressed desire to have a German Army Corps consisting of two German divisions and an Italian division and in reserve a German division and an Italian division //

Please apply O.K.W. because the expressed wishes are particularly welcomed the one concerning the establishment of reserves with a German division and an Italian division // *Ugo Cavallero* //

Document n. 64.

EXCERPTS FROM THE CAVALLERO DIARY

07/25/1942:

8.45 hours. Telephone to the Duce. Topics:

- .....

- At the Russian front advance continues. It is believed that the 8<sup>th</sup> Army will be located at the Don to form a defensive front while the armored units continue.

- It seems that the 8<sup>th</sup> Army is not very satisfied but I do not think you can do anything about it as you yourself told Magli days ago. Magli has called Marras to clarify things, but basically he will do as you said: "*let the command act*".

- We will insist that the Alpines be employed in the Caucasus. It would be absurd for them to be employed in the plains. After all, even the Germans make important assignments to them.

Document n. 65.

COMMAND 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY  
GENERAL STAFF - OFFICE OPERATIONS

Prot. N. 02/19 # 5

P.M. 6, on 27 July 1942. XX

*Subject:* Deployment of the Army on the Don

*To the Army Corps Commands (II CA.)*

*To the Weapons Commands*

*To the "Cosseria" Division Command*

*To the Celere Division Command*

*To the General Inspector CC.RR.*

*To the Lieutenant General M.V.S.N.*

*To the Quartermaster*

and, for knowledge:

*To the Heeresgruppe Command "B"*

*To the Command German XXIX Corps*

[through Germanic connection unit  
at the 8<sup>th</sup> Army command.

The 8th Army must deploy on the Don in the sector between Pawlowsk (excluded) and confluence of the river Choper.



The deployment on the front will be as follows (starting from the left: see glossy annex):

- II Corps: with a German division - on the left - and *Torino* and *Ravenna* divisions: between Pawlowsk (excluded) and Bogutschar (included);
- XXIX Corps German: with an Italian division (*Cosseria*) - on the left - and two German divisions: between Bogutschar and Werch. Wodjanskij (excluded);
- XXXV Corps with divisions *Pasubio* and *Sforzesca*: between Werch. Wodjanskij and Choper confluence (included).

Definition of divisional sector limits: by Corps commands Grande Units in reserve:

- a German division in the Ssmaglejewka - Taly area;
- the *Celere* division in the Sstrakowskij - Olchowskij area. This division is for now a temporary provision of the 6<sup>th</sup> German Army command, from which it was used to garnish a section of the Donez on the right and on the left of Jelanskoje.

In consequence of the above the Corps II and XXXV and the *Cosseria* division command:

- they will immediately contact the XXIX Corps German (which is located in Schirinowka - south of Bogutschar - and which has for now the responsibility of the entire sector destined to the Army) to define the modalities for the replacement of troops online, assumption of responsibility of the assigned front and to have news on the situation , enemy, terrain, routes and resources;
- will issue provisions for the start-up in the area of use of the dependent units, bearing in mind the need to speed up the replacement.

The translocation tables referring to the movements of the single G.U. and communicated the date under which the commands of Corps take responsibility for the relevant sector and the location of the relevant command.

The *Cosseria* division, which remains at my direct operational dependencies until it passes under those of the XXIX Corps German, will follow in the movement the director Belowodsk - Strelzowka - Nikolskoje - south Klubkowka - Schirinowka, with the following modalities:

- 31 July: stage in Olchowo;
- 1 August: stage in Tschuginka;
- 2 August: stage in Gorodischtsche;
- 3 August: stage in Belowodsk;
- 4 August: rest;
- 5 August: stage in Strelzowka;
- 6 August: stage in Nikolskoje;
- 7 August: stage in Filipjew;
- 8 August: rest;
- 9 August: Schirinowka.

By law I will notify that the Army tactical command will be established (I reserves the right to specify the date) in Nikolskoje; logistics headquarters in Millerowo.

General of the Army designated  
Commander  
*Italo Gariboldi*

Document n. 66.

COMMAND 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY  
GENERAL STAFF - OPERATIONS OFFICE

P.M. 6, July 29, 1942. XX

Prot. N. 02/1940

*Subject:* New situation facing the Army.

*To Army Corps Commands (II and XXXV)*

Their offices

Following sheet 02/1940 on 7<sup>th</sup> issued, I transmit the combined order on date 28<sup>th</sup> of the Army Group "B" command, containing indications about the Army classification, consistency and tasks of the XXIX Corps Germanic. As a consequence of the reduction of the divisions of the XXIX Corps from 4 to 3, the Germanic reserve division is abolished.

As a communal complement:

- the line runs along the Don (right bank ours, left bank Russian) except at the Werch loop, Manon, which is all in Russian hands (the line runs at the base of the loop);
  - few of the reinforcing works started on both sides;
  - Don is not an impassable obstacle, being almost everywhere crossable even on foot. The right bank is dominant, but offers the enemy dead angles that can be used. Therefore careful vigilance is required;
  - the opposing enemy forces seem to amount, for now, to 4 infantry divisions belonging to the 63<sup>rd</sup> army: ternary divisions and full effective divisions (companies of 180 men);
  - up to now limited operational activity of both parties to that of patrols, especially at night;
  - reduced enemy air activity (isolated aircraft);
  - no partisan activity in the rear; they wander in the area many Russian deserters and fugitives returning to their homes. No one has manifested hostile intentions so far;
  - abundant resources of wheat and livestock. Discrete, but localized, of wood.
- Water lacking and potable..

General of the Army designate  
Commander  
*Italo Gariboidi*

Document n. 67.

COMMAND II ARMY CORPS  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

*Secret.*

P.M. 20, on 1 August 1942. XX

No. 2010/02 of prot.

*Subject:* Occupation of the combat line and command and troop behavior.

*To the Commanders of Division, Arms and Groups*  
and, for knowledge:  
*To the Army Command*

In a few days the troops of the Corps they will have the honor of occupying the combat line on the Don.

I am sure that everyone will be able to make the mind of the employees vibrate with pride when the heart of the distant homeland must pulsate more than ever alive in us in the thought that its eyes on us are proud and trusting.

To this great moral throb must join a prudent foresight intended to set, from the beginning, the action of our commands and that of our troops.

The front is occupied by substitution and being very wide (from 25 to 30 km per division) requires, as is already underway, vigilance (safety line) on the river and occupation in units and battlefield (with sector reserves) in depth.

The bank in our hand dominates the opposing one, but, especially in the salient that the Don forms where he receives the Tschernaja Kalitwa, he offers the enemy: woods and villages along the river; jealousy of the river itself (in many places even on foot) and possibility of using tanks (the presence of 1 armored brigade is also reported).

I particularly call the attention of all the unit commanders that in the exchange of deliveries they will receive the impression that the front is so to speak "peaceful" because, so far, only actions of patrols have occurred.

So it is in fact for the moment, but it will not be as soon as the substitution occurred as in all probability (not to say with certainty) the enemy will attack in the hope of a success on troops that he believes (and in part are) new to combat .

So he did just yesterday with the other *Celere* division in motion that valiantly rejected the attack.

It is therefore necessary to react with all means to the "peaceful" expression and to maintain, and more intensely, the first few days (to say even better the

first *nights*, since the Russians prefer the nocturnal attack) vigilance and ready the means of reaction.

Particular care must be taken in arranging the anti-tank vehicles (artillery in general) that, as far as possible, this command will integrate with its artillery where the need is most evident.

Reinforcement and defense equipment (mines, wire fence, lighting flares, anti-tank obstacles) have been requested and will come soon. Meanwhile, the commands rely on their own means and study their sector also for the most careful use of the reinforcing means that I will certainly put at their disposal (anti-tank 47 co., flamethrower co., Machine guns co., etc.).

*Receipt.*

The General of Corps  
Commander  
*G. Zanghieri*

Document n. 68.

COMMAND OF THE 8<sup>TH</sup> ARMY  
GENERAL STAFF - OPERATIONS OFFICE

Prot. N. 02/2012 - Attachments n. 2.

P.M. 6, on 2 August 1942. XX

*Subject:* Defense of the Don.

*... addresses omitted ...*

For the execution, I combine two orders received from the Army Group Command "B", one tactical the other technical dealing with the defensive positioning of the front assigned to us. Another more detailed technical is being issued. Although the documents are clear and comprehensive, I add a few considerations and rules for the implementation of the orders.

1<sup>st</sup> - *The front* assigned to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army is known. It must be sacrosanct and inviolate by the enemy. Large front with frontal obstruction (Don) of low efficiency; welded almost anywhere; our dominating shore which is good, but as it often falls steeply on the river, it causes many dead angles; consequent ease of enemy surprises and active vigilance.

2<sup>nd</sup> - *Currently*, there are four ternary divisions facing us.

3<sup>rd</sup> - *Our available forces*, known. There are not many, I know, but the discussion would not increase a man, nor would it decrease his front. Instead we need to provide.

4<sup>th</sup> - There is a long pause; it is therefore necessary to provide both the *defensive arrangement and the organization of the housings*.

5<sup>th</sup> - A) *Defensive arrangement*: front and depth.

Front. Given the situation of forces and means, it is obvious that a continuous line of work is not possible or convenient. On the contrary, it is necessary to *arrange points, units* (strongholds, centers, nests, etc.) well chosen and suitably dosed, always as possible on a chessboard (staggered) but not rigid, neither geometric, but adapted to the ground, able to give strength and support to our action and hinder the opposing one instead. Prevailing attention to the lines of facilitation for the enemy, but do not neglect the rest: it is there where surprises are easier.

In short: at the fixed points, which are themselves static, to unite the vigilant movement of light and rapid elements; preparing the mobile reaction (counterattack see n. 8), continuous and careful observation; multiple and secure connections.

6<sup>th</sup> - *Material obstacle*. It is well illustrated in the higher orders as entity and location:

- make the bank of the Don an anti-tank obstacle by adapting the ground or creating the ditch. Other elements of ditch where necessary to give depth to the defense. Complete with mines;
- continuous barbed wire on the front;
- encircle the fortified points and all the locations of troops, commands and services.

7<sup>th</sup> - *Fires*. In addition to the usual provisions, maximum care against tanks. Assistance of the different means.

8<sup>th</sup> - *Depth*. The different commands, from the most modest to those of G.U., must have available units to intervene in the action (the most effective way to make their authority felt). In order for these elements to arrive promptly they need to have a speed proportionate to the front of the unit they serve. It will therefore be necessary that the commands of G.U., when they do not have especially suitable units, study the way of constituting columns with speed and abundant firefighting (maximum of the gun barrels with the minimum of those that consume).

We are not rich in vehicles, I know. Do it with what you have, using it with appropriate maneuvers. They must not be physical formations that hypothesize means and weapons, but units to be used with the means that at times are available. Difficult? I know that's why I entrust the study to high authorities.

In the study of depth, the aforementioned arrangement of the region behind the line for the command and service units is of great importance, to be completed with the organization of those randomness (communication ganglia - dominant points) which, although not being housing places, they have an emerging tactical importance.

9<sup>th</sup> - *Start work immediately* without losing a day.

Study the complete plan with a wide vision and from it orient each shot of spade or pickaxe to avoid doing and undoing (waste of time, waste of energy).

Calculate and request what you need in material, but do not wait for it to arrive, start with what you have or find on the spot.

Arrange communications in each area, to facilitate the timely arrival of what is needed and the regular flow of traffic. Take care of multiple connections that give absolute security of continuity.

Work hard without being tied to your border. The highest bodies are always of practical help to the most modest.

10<sup>th</sup> - B) *Organization of housings.*

Given the long-term forecast, it is also necessary to prepare for the *change of season.*

Study therefore of *shelter* that - given the scarcity of inhabited and the course of the line - will have to be largely drawn from the ground (experience of C.S.I.R. comforts to consider them suitable).

If then there will be other means (barracks or other) so much better, but we must also prepare to do without it.

*Also here do not waste time.* To study the problem in its vastness in an organic, harmonious and complete way and summarizing it in requests; but in the meantime to start, it will be so much earned.

11<sup>th</sup> - All requests for the need for *defensive accommodation* and housing are immediately materialized and communicated, albeit at first with approximate figures, for the orientation of those who must provide.

I will be sent along with the projects of works by the Army Corps, command of engineers and Quartermaster, for the part that interests everyone.

12<sup>th</sup> - Engineer Command, taking into account the requirements of the Army Engineer Command Group and using the valuable experience of our XXXV (C.S.I.R.) compile practical rules to facilitate the task of employees especially for smaller units.

General of the Army designate  
Commander  
*I. Gariboldi*

Annex n. 1 to f. n. 02/2012

ARMY GROUP "B" COMMAND  
Operations Office - General of Engineering

N. 2091/42 sgr.

Q.G., on 14 July 1942. XX

*Subject: Organization of positions.*

*To the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Command*

*Army Group von Weichs (with attachments for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army)*

A) The new requirements (instructions) "*Generalities on the services of the engineers in winter*" will be ready for printing in one or more dossiers for 15 August 1942. Among other things, they will also contain a part dedicated to the "*Field work in winter*".

*For the recognition and adaptation (preparation) of the ground the following directives are given. They are based on the experience made in the past winter.*

B) *Obstacles and mines,*

1<sup>st</sup> - a) *The uninterrupted obstacle in front of the whole front of the position is of decisive importance:* in the individual sectors, for example, an uninterrupted obstacle consisting of cases of barbed wire, placed in the snow, can be sufficient close to each other and tied together with barbed wire so that the Russian is forced to stop and can be shot down with fire.

*The frontal obstruction* is generally performed with preplanned work.

Units of artisans trained in their own the Regt., Bn. or Co. can in particular winter conditions, accelerate the construction, take care of the obstacles, and quickly close some flaws.

For the exploring patrols, hidden passages are necessary.

b) Minor urgency is the creation of single (interrupted) obstacles (formed with porcupines and barbed wire), depending on the time, the strength and the means at their disposal, and the connection (communications) between them. The aforementioned obstacles only have the task of holding back the enemy's surprise attacks in order to give the occupants the chance to take up defense provisions. This is the difference with paragraph B) 1<sup>st</sup> - a) which is available for uninterrupted frontal obstacles.

2<sup>nd</sup> - The use of the precious T mine as an element - even if continuous - of the frontal obstacle is inadvisable. T mines are used to fight enemy tanks. The effect against infantry - especially of frozen mines - is poor. *We must also oppose the useless, and yield-free, scattering of individual mines on the ground.* This use of T-mines is quick, but it also deceives the effect and can not under any circumstances replace an uninterrupted frontal obstacle.

T mines must be centralized and stored in the passages that can be crossed by tanks, so that they constitute a real defense (with mines). With this use of mines, A/T weapons are released which can thus be used for the concentration of fire at other points of possible transit for tanks.

A clear judgment and a careful and deep recognition are the natural premise to the above.

*The use of T mines must be directed by the upper commands - Div., Regt. - that will give the appropriate provisions.*

3<sup>rd</sup> - *General.*

a) *The maintenance and construction* of obstacles of any kind *in winter* requires considerable effort. The more prepared they are, the greater will be the usefulness that the troops will derive from them.

b) For reasons of economy, the upper command of the Army has ordered that the construction of the obstacles be done in the mixed way (barbed wire and normal wire).

C) *The position.*

1<sup>st</sup> - *The intention to adopt a defense of movement* to allow troops to set aside in the inhabited places, has frequently allowed the invasion of the enemy. The refusal of these invasions with the counterattack - if this was still possible - has always cost serious losses.

2<sup>nd</sup> - *The defense organized on milestones between them more or less distant showed the defect that the Russian always managed to penetrate through some flaws.* A complete closure, for lack of strength or means was often not possible. The lack of an uninterrupted obstacle favored the method of fighting the enemy.

3<sup>rd</sup> - *The defense at the edge of the inhabited areas* generally led to local combats, in which at first the Russian had the upper hand (superiority). The alarm to the occupants of the place lasted too long. *This was due above all to the sparse order of the buildings. Obstacles and positions of defense must be placed at due distance from the edges of inhabited areas.*

The barrier and defense of the sites in the depths of the battlefield retain its full value.

*The arrangement of well organized defense positions with centers of fire moved in depth* gave a good performance to the effects of defense.

The wide use of fake positions, even in depth of the position, contemporary with interchangeable positions, deceive the enemy on our intentions and strength.

4<sup>th</sup> - *In the construction of command posts* (shelters) and forts it is to be kept in mind that the construction must correspond to the needs of winter.

To this realization, among other things, it contributes to:

a) creation of the *necessary conditions of combat* (obstacles, sectors of shooting, positions for heavy and light infantry weapons, and for artillery, panoramic sketches);

b) *creation of the necessary living conditions* (heating, lighting, resting places);

c) *robust and solid constructions*, even if the foundations require more time and effort.

The *same points of view* are valid for the construction of artillery positions.

*Target.* The occupants and servants of the station must be able to live in shelters for a long time and fight keeping their combat efficiency intact.

5<sup>th</sup> - *The necessity and the advantages* of a skilful masking must always be recommended and repeated.

6<sup>th</sup> - *The technical peculiarities* for the construction of winter positions and the types of such positions (positions) will be contained in the "Winter provisions" referred to in paragraph A.

D) *Communications.*

The winter 1941 - 42, rich in snowfall, has clearly demonstrated the importance of the effectiveness of communications. It is still recommended (especially):



- a) *storage of all supplies*: must be made so that they are accessible even during the winter, therefore on or near the roads; that they will remain open to traffic and not too isolated;
- b) *installations of field railways* (Decauville): it can be very useful;
- c) *prompt preparation or preparation of snow fences*: (see provisions of the 1980/42 no. of July 3, 1942 of the Army Group South command);
- d) *preparation of sleds, skates for sledges and draft animals*;
- e) training and preparation of snow-clearing units (units for clearing snow) including the necessary means.

E) *Equipment.*

*The timely preparation and endowment of warehouses or parks of engineers* (corps and div.) As well as the establishment of advanced warehouses, save a lot of road and time in winter.

The transitability of the roads for *access to these warehouses* must be ensured.

One has to tend to bring the troops at once to his place of employment in order to avoid all the work of loading and unloading the means of transport and consequent storage and unstorage.

F) *General.*

a) It is left to the Armies, also as regards the artillery, to deepen, with short courses and lessons, the knowledge of their personal instructor, on the obstacles and constructions of positions.

b) Also in early September the O.K.H. intends to organize a winter training course, with the participation of Finnish officials and to be carried out in Arys. Related orders will follow.

Please note briefly the provisions that have been issued following paragraph F) a).

For the Army Group B Command  
-The Chief of Staff

Annex n. 2 to f. n. 02/2012

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE DEFENSE OF WOLGA AND DON

*Secret.*

Strong shares of the Army Group "B" during this winter will be used to defend the Walga and the Don. I therefore indicate the following *principles for the defense of rivers*:

1. - The *defense* of rivers is not made in an elastic way but rather in a *rigid way*. Above all, it is necessary to prevent the enemy in the most absolute way of crossing, even temporarily, the obstacle of the river. Enemy attacks must

be annihilated *in front* of the line of defense and this with the concentrated fire of all weapons. *The line of defense is represented by the bank occupied by us.* Exceptions to this principle require the consent of the Senior Command of the Army Group and must be proposed on topographic map 1:100,000.

2. - First of all, *security against tanks is essential.*

On the Don - which during the summer season brings little water and can therefore easily be crossed by men on foot and tanks - safety is given by nature only where the defense bank falls vertically towards the river bed. Also in these points defensive works will be necessary.

3. - Since the south-west bank of the Don, almost along the entire length of the front, is higher than the other side, at the points where the bank does not fall sufficiently steeply, safety can be achieved by using a *flaring of the earth thus forming a perpendicular bank.*

Where this is not possible, anti-tank ditches must be constructed, complete with minefields. *Anti-tank weapons* must be placed in such a way that the concentration of fire gravitates in the points less protected by nature, so that the mass of attacking enemy tanks can be taken under fire before the anti-tank obstacle.

4. - The uninterrupted observation of the entire enemy bank, even through numerous advanced artillery observatories, is absolutely indispensable. *River lighting* must also be prepared and ready to be available for floating mines and burning rafts.

The infantry obstacle (cross-linked and barbed wire) must be erected in the immediate vicinity of the bank.

5. - *Fire plans*, with which the combined artillery fire, anti-tank weapons and heavy infantry weapons are coordinated, must guarantee a complete fire protection in front and on the anti-tank obstacle and allow the concentration of fire in centers of gravity. Use on the sides can often bring advantages.

6. - *Unfinished positions* hide the danger that the alarm will be delayed.

7. - Possible enemy infiltrations must be stopped by *the barrage centers and support centers*, located in the depth of the defense line, in order to allow counterattack.

8. - Local *reserves* (for counterattack) must be kept as close as possible to the line of defense. The second-line reserves (for the attack) must be given sufficient opportunity for a rapid shift in particularly threatened sectors. The protection of *sectoral limits* must be guaranteed by appropriate allocation of reserves.

9. - All the combatant and logistic units, the commands and organizations found *deep within* the defense line and behind it must be organized in order to defend themselves with their own means, forming resistance centers.

The employment of defense positions in the event of an alarm must be prepared and tested previously and periodically as training.

In the inhabited areas where several units are located, the command unit (appointment of a defense commander) must be ensured.

10. - The development of the *connecting network*, including that between sector and sector, is of the utmost importance.

11. - The particular needs of autumn (mud period) and winter must be taken into account in all work.

FHR. v. *Weichs*  
Colonel General

Document n. 69.

XXXV ARMY CORPS COMMAND (C.S.I.R.)  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

*Very urgent.*

No. 8630/Op. of prot.

P.M. 88, on 7 August 1942. XX

*Subject:* Deployment of the XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.) on the Don.

*To the Pasubio Infantry Division Command*

*To the Sforzesca Infantry Division Command*

*To the Mounted Troop Grouping Command*

*To the CC.NN. Regimental Group "3 Gennaio "*

*To the Artillery Command of the Corps.*

*To the Engineer Command of the Corps*

and, for knowledge:

*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command*

Their offices

1. - The defensive sector on the Don assigned to the Corps. It has an amplitude as the crow flies of over 52 km from Kumokowskij excluded to the mouth of the Choper.

Contact limits with lateral G.U.s are established as follows:

- to the left (with XXIX Corps German) - Lossen (to XXIX) - Dubrowskoj (to XXIX) - Kumokowskij (to XXIX) – hill 231 (10 km south of Kumokowskij) - Kosyrik (to the XXIX) - Iwanowskij (to the XXIX) - Kamenka (to the XXIX) - course of the Jablonowaja;
- on the right with the 79<sup>th</sup> Div. of the XVII Corps. (6<sup>th</sup> Army): Kumylshenskaja (at XXXV) - course of the Choper up to the mouth - course of the Zuzkan up to the mouth - course of the Beresowka.

2. - The current situation is approximately known to employees Divisional commands; the surveys they are making must be complete and keep the notion of it up to date.

In summary: the right bank of the Don is completely in our possession from Kumokowskij to Jelanskoje, with enemy forces in front of quite substantial; from east Jelanskoje, our occupation of the right bank is instead precarious, entrusted to very weak forces of surveillance between which there are enemy infiltrations; on the other hand the opposing enemy forces are not very consistent.

From this it derives:

- for *Pasubio* Div., which will have to line up on the left, the problem of insertion in line coincides with that of a simple substitution except for the need to revise the current deployment where necessary to adapt it to the current situation and the availability of force and means;
- for *Sforzesca* Div., which will have to deploy on the right, the same problem presents instead from the beginning marked characters of indeterminacy which can force it to more delicate and complex measures resorting, if necessary, to partial acts of fighting to reach the right bank of the Don.

3. - In realizing the deployment on the Don the Corps and in particular the *Sforzesca* division will have to take into account that the tactical contact with the side G.U. of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army may present, at least in the first half, some element of uncertainty.

Result:

- the *Sforzesca* division must constitute a strong defensive flank facing east between the mouth of the Choper and the head of the Zuzkan stream;
- the grouping CC.NN. «3 Gennaio» (including the Croatian Legion) will have to extend the defensive side south along the Zuzkan to include Blinoff.

4. - The line of contact between the divisions *Pasubio* and *Sforzesca* is provisionally established along the meridian passing through hill 210 (12 km south - southwest of Jelanskoje).

The contact line between the *Sforzesca* division and the CC.NN grouping. «3 Gennaio» is provisionally established along the eastern Gorbato - Krutowskoj road to the junction with the Blinoff - Jagodnyi road; then along the junction that crossroads with the crest of the ridge of the right bank of the Don at the point where it is crossed by the Tschebotarew - Simowskij road. The «Zuzkan» sector entrusted to the Group CC.NN. «3 Gennaio» will be included between this contact line and the Blinoff - Belawinskij road (Kriuscha valley).

5. - The divisions *Pasubio* and *Sforzesca* reached Bokowskaja at the dates indicated in the roadmap already issued, will have to diverge for their sector going up respectively the course of the Tschir and Tschernaja (*Pasubio* division) and the course of the Kriuscha (*Sforzesca* division)."

The modes of marching and deployment will be set by division commanders based on the following concepts:

- a) any staging days must be planned beyond Bokowskaja, densely occupied by troops and services of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army and the target of enemy air strikes;
- b) the certifying to the Don and the change of troops in line must be made no later than the night from August 13 to 14 for the *Pasubio* division and the night from August 14 to 15 for the *Sforzesca* division: however, it may be anticipated, the judgment of the division commanders, if precarious housing conditions along the itineraries to be followed make this advance preferable;
- c) to precede the artisan and connections companies for the re-establishment of communications and the taking over of telephone networks;
- d) direct agreements with the on-site commanders for the modalities of influx of the units in line (surveys, guides, etc.);
- e) communicate with 24 hours in advance the day and hour foreseen for the assumption of responsibility for the divisional sector (no later than 8 am on August 14 for the *Pasubio* division and 8 am on August 15 for the *Sforzesca* division).

6. - As an orientation, I propose to assign the following reinforcement units to the two sectors for the first time:

- *Pasubio* division:

1 company of machine guns of Corps;

1 group of 105/32;

- *Sforza* division:

CIV bn. machine guns of Corps (minus 2 companies);

1 group of 105/32;

1 75/32 battery.

Separate orders for the influx of such units.

Decisions for the remaining units at my disposal will be taken to clarified situation.

7 - Waiting for Bokowskaja, chosen as the definitive seat of the Command, to be evacuated by Germanic troops and services, the Tactical Command of the XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.) will be provisionally established in Karinowskaja (Tschir valley) about halfway between Archipowski and Latischenskij.

Date to be specified.

8. - As soon as they are on line, the troops will have to give immediate and intense start to the strengthening work, according to a summary program promptly materialized and exploiting for the moment materials and means available or on site.

General of the Army Corps  
Commander  
*Giovanni Messe*

Document n. 70.

XVII CORPS COMMAND

July 28, 1942

*To the Command of the Celere Division*

Order of the Army Corps for July 29, 1942 - XX.

1<sup>st</sup> - enemy activity on the Don is invariable; from the bridgehead AT Serafimowitsch the enemy made weak attacks in the day yesterday and today, which were rejected.

2<sup>nd</sup> - XVII Corps on July 29th at 20:00, takes command in the Baskowski-Jelanskoje sector (excluded). The Army Corps protects the Don sector and takes possession of the southern bank at Serafimowitsch held until now by the enemy.

3<sup>rd</sup> - *Assignments:*

a) The *Celere* Division reaches the space to the South-West of Serafimowitsch, the Division protects the Baskowski sector (included) - Rybny (excluded) and makes with maximum acceleration the preparation for the taking of the Serafimowitsch bridgehead. It is necessary to carry out the attack as soon as possible, because the enemy reinforces on the southern bank of the Don. The Division is subjected to a Regt. of infantry I.R. 578 (without a battalion).

b) Division 79<sup>th</sup> (minus 1/3) collects in the space north of Blinof and takes security with the advanced forces in the Rybny sector (included) - Jelanskoje (excluded). Immediate provisions of explorations in connection with the infantry Regt. I.R. 578.

c) Reinforced I.R. 578 (without a bn) implements the securities used on the Don west of the bridgehead at Serafimowitsch without regard to a possible change by division 79<sup>th</sup> in space to S.W. Serafimowitsch. The Regt. is subjected on the 27<sup>th</sup> at 20:00 to the *Celere* Div. by means of radiogram.

4<sup>th</sup> - *Separation lines:*

a) Right towards the Corps XVII P.K. Karagitschew - Nemuchin - Baskowskij (area of the *Celere*).

b) Between *Celere* Div. and Div. 79<sup>th</sup>: Kotorowskij (79<sup>th</sup>) - Niskin Kalmikowskij (*Celere*) - Isbuscenskji (79<sup>th</sup>) - Rybny (79<sup>th</sup>).

c) For Corps XXIX A.K. via Bokowskaja, Jelanskoje (towards XXIX A.K.).

5<sup>th</sup> - *Connections, information:* with the two Div. by telephone and radiogram.

6<sup>th</sup> - *Army Corps Combat Post:* Warlamoff (27 km eastwards Seskowkaja) from midday on 29 July.

*Hollidt*  
Infantry General

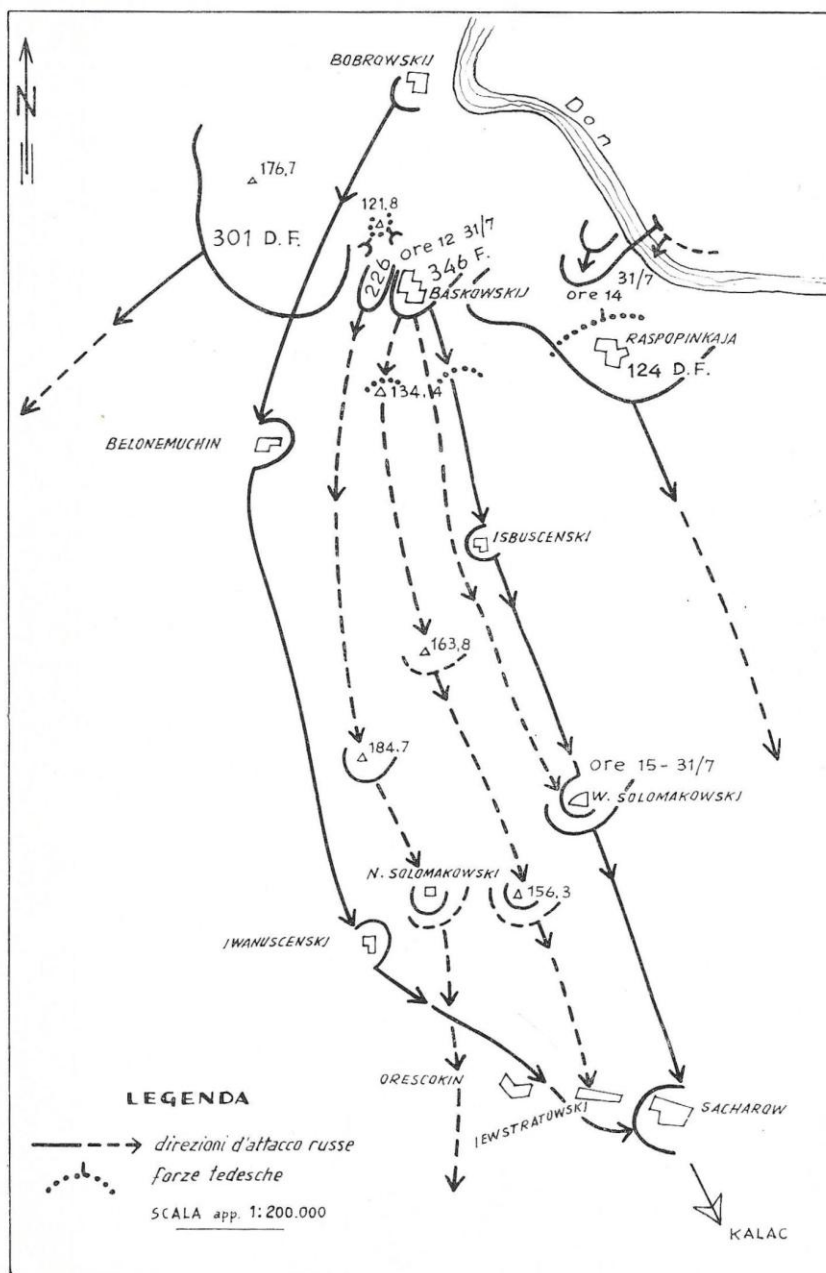
SKETCH FOUND ON AN OFFICIAL RUSSIAN AT BOBROWSKIJ

On August 3, 1942

Documento n. 71.

SCHIZZO TROVATO SU UN UFFICIALE RUSSO A BOBROWSKIJ

il 3 agosto 1942



Document n. 72.

THE GENERAL COMMANDER OF THE XVII CORPS

August 14, 1942

ORDER OF THE DAY FOR THE CORPS

On August 14th, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division separates itself from the units of the Army Corps and prepares itself for new tasks.

I feel the most lively impulse to express to this valiant Italian division my sincere gratitude for its combative performance. The Division, under the magnificent guidance of its Commander, General of Division Marazzani, in union with the German troops, conquered the heavily fortified and tenaciously defended Serafimowitsch bridgehead with overwhelming attack.

Despite the use of numerous tanks, the enemy could not contain the division's attack. In stubborn defense and many counterattacks, the division, shoulder to shoulder with the German troops, has crushed the repeated attacks that the Soviets have launched to conquer the west bank of the Don.

My thoughts go to the brave heroes who gave life and blood for the common victory and for their homeland.

It was an honor for me to have had the magnificent division under my command. The hard battles of the Don's donation have once again strengthened the faithful brotherhood of arms between Italian and German troops.

My thanks are also due to the pure spirit of comradeship and the constant collaboration that the Italian troops have in every moment, demonstrated towards the German comrades and have confirmed it with the facts. With this courageous spirit and with the indissoluble alliance we will reach the final victory.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Celere Division, during the battle of the Don has added new laurels to its flags. On the way to victory, he can gather new superb successes.

*Hollidt*



REPORT TO COLONEL COMMANDANTE  
OF THE 6<sup>th</sup> BERSAGLIERI REGIMENT

(presented on 19 August 1942 by the Head of the Regimental Medical Service Capitan  
doctor (s.p.e.) Dr. Carlo Elisei)

From the medical examination spent in recent days to all the soldiers of the Regiment it was found that 350 soldiers have a fairly severe state of decay and anemia.

About 30% of the members of the Regiment tell of gastrointestinal disorders consisting of inappetence, difficult digestion, epigastric pains, intestinal liability as a consequence of temperature changes, excessive physical exertions and dietary errors.

About 40% of the soldiers is suffering from the bad state of the teeth; and not a few of them, due to widespread decay and alveolitis, particularly frequent in Russia due to the climate and the scarcity of vitamins, will soon lose their eligibility for military service.

It must be recognized that the problem of dental care, especially conservative, has not been seriously considered; while the long stay of men in arms, the age of no more young than many of them and the difficult conditions of climate and power imposed by the areas of operations of the current war, would require constant and assiduous care for the main purpose of not lose good men.

About 50 soldiers need medical - legal measures for various causes (lack of teeth, gastric diseases of suspected ulcerative nature, hernias, varicoceles, etc.). Those subjects hitherto withheld for the special circumstances of this last period of time, need urgent elimination because, unable to do service, they constitute a useless weight for the units.

*Troops.* The 260 troops these days are roughly in fair general conditions; among them there are 26 wounded (for most of the Greek front), 24 ex - frozen and 13 ex - malarial.

As for the above, the sanitary conditions of the Regiment at the present time can not be considered good.

And this does not surprise those who have followed all the activities of the Regiment since the spring of 1939, an era in which the 6<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri was prepared, to date.

The long periods of camp in Italy, where the units were subjected to overtraining, the arduous period spent in Sicily, the Yugoslavian campaign and the subsequent operational cycles in Dalmatia and Bosnia have deeply affected the physical of the Bersaglieri.

Upon returning from the Balkans, where, despite not having suffered significant losses, the Regiment had lavished its best energy moving continuously, staying in the most inhospitable places, sacrificing themselves always waiting for a rest of the times promised, never granted; on the return from the Balkans, I repeat, the Regiment would have needed a long and peaceful stay in the homeland to strengthen itself, eliminate all the waste and calmly prepare itself for new trials.

Instead, after a very brief period, they left for Russia. And it was necessary to appeal for the need of staff even to men who were physically inept to the exceptional labors of the Russian front, and they responded and have responded up to now supported by their will and the moral action of the commanders.

As is already known, the Russian winter was endured by the Regiment in a march lasting over a month; the hard periods of line and all the activities up to now are equally too well known.

The current health conditions of the Regiment are due to this complex of peace and war activities, which have never met stops.

In conclusion: I believe that only a long period of rest in a comfortable place, which is no doubt the current one, and a severe elimination of unsuitable men, in addition to all other ancillary provisions (good nutrition, appropriate provision, spiritual distraction of the troops in the form of shows, games, etc.) it will give back to the Regiment the physical efficiency to which the moral solidity is closely linked.

Document n. 74.

SFORZESCA INFANTRY DIVISION COMMAND (2nd)  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF G.S. - SEC. OP. AND SERV.

No. 1/825 / Op. of prot.

P.M. 69, on 21 August 1942. XX – 22:00 hours

*Subject:* Constitution of a new defensive line.

*To the left sector Command*  
*To the right sector Command*  
*To the Divisional Artillery Command*  
*To the Regimental Group Barbò*

Following higher orders this division with all its available forces must constitute two defensive pillars one in Jagodnij and one in Tschebotarewskij with the task of resistance to the bitter end and whose possession marks the honor of division *stop*.

I order:

1<sup>st</sup> - Jagodnij's defensive pillar will be constituted by the 53<sup>rd</sup> infantry reinforced by the flamethrower company, by the 121<sup>st</sup> Co. cannons of 47/32 and 1 divisional Co. mortars of 81 and from the illuminators platoon of the engineers.

*Commander:* Col. Contini.

*Artillery:* the strongpoint will have the I/17<sup>th</sup> in the north-west position of Jagodnij, a 75/32 battery in a position south of Jagodnij and a bty. of 105/32 of the LX group brought to the side of the previous one.

The strongpoint must have a development proportionate to the available strength. However, in order to have a certain safety it must have a diameter of 4 - 5 km keeping in mind that it will have to make connection with the *Pasubio* division to the balka Olchowatka front.

2<sup>nd</sup> - Tschegotarewskij defensive pillar: will be constituted by the 54<sup>th</sup> Inf. reinforced by all the elements currently in reinforcement and by the 63<sup>rd</sup> Bn. CC.NN..

*Commander*: General Vaccaro.

*Artillery*:

II/17<sup>th</sup> Regt.a.df.;

III/17<sup>th</sup> Regt.a.df.;

Horse Art. group Borghini.

The strongpoint must have, like the previous one, a development proportional to the available strength and be constituted with the same criteria.

3<sup>rd</sup> - The grouping "Barbò" reinforced by the 79<sup>th</sup> CC.NN. has the task of surveillance and defense interval between the two strongpoints. It is understood that the 1<sup>st</sup> group Savoia with the Bn on horseback are part of the group "Barbò".

*Services*: the current service units remain in place with the only difference being that section on health and units, called section they will move to Gorbatoowo and Bolschoj respectively.

The General Commander  
*Carlo Pellegrini*

Document n. 75.

PHONOGRAM

August 25, 1942

*From the 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY Command*

*To the Command XXXV Corps. (C.S.I.R.)*

No. 02/2596/Op. of 25 August alt I acknowledge the communication that the dependent troops have not received a withdrawal order *stop* Army Group Command orders: 1<sup>st</sup>) No one must retreat from the backward positions; whoever orders it is subject to serious penalties; 2<sup>nd</sup>) The terrain between the right limit of the 8th Italian Army and the Bokowskaja - Jelanskoje road with the troops located in it goes under the XVII<sup>th</sup> German Army Corps *stop* Specification reserved *stop* General *Gariboldi*

Document n. 76.

PHONOGRAM

August 25, 1942

*From the Command XXXV Corps. (C.S.I.R.)  
To Command 8<sup>th</sup> Army*

No. 9594/Op. *stop* August 25, 16:30 *stop* Depending on the new situation, the collapse of the right wing of the Corps is in progress to complete the fall with the disengagement of the minor units in line on the front hill 219 - right bank of Val Kriutscha up to the height of Gorbatowo where you will try to build with safety elements a bridgehead to protect that road node *stop* On this line I ordered to resist to the last man until the last man *stop* from the unknowns of this delicate unhooking maneuver, I now represent the lack of any wing support, the tenuous density of deployment that can be achieved, the absolute lack of reinforcements and every smaller element of the second echelon and above all the fact that the scarce troops are extremely tired and worn out *stop* In these conditions I am absolutely not able to provide for the defense of the Bokowskaja node *stop* Decisions about the use of the reserves of upcoming attendance are necessarily subordinated to the situation that will have matured at the moment of their arrival *stop* It is also absolutely impossible to distract elements of my very few troops in the Bolschoy area with the task of acting on the left of the 79<sup>th</sup> division to block that line towards south *stop* General *Messe*

Document n. 77.

CONVERSATION VERBALIZATION  
BETWEEN GENERAL MESSE  
Commander XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.)  
AND THE MAJOR OF G.S. Fellmer

Chief of the Germanic connection unit at the XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.)  
happened this morning at 06:45

P.M. 88, on August 26 – 07:00

1<sup>st</sup> - You know, because I have already told you, that my intention, based on the situation that had come to determine the morning of 25 August, was to rectify the defensive flank on the right of the Corps doing it

pass on the ridge west of Valle Kriuscha to create a barrier to protect the right wing of the Army and also to block the node of Gorbatowskij.

2<sup>nd</sup> - Since the strongpoint of Tschebotarewskij, I was pressed by overwhelming enemy forces and unable to constitute an appreciable contact with the left wing of XVII Corps Germanic, I had arranged, considering also the very few available forces, to make them descend slowly - facing the enemy - along the Tschebotarewskij - Gorbatowskij fold line, to meet in this last place where I had given the order to constitute a defensive pillar.

In such circumstances the *Novara* Regiment had to restrain the advancing enemy on Bolschoj and, after passing that location, bend towards Gorbatowskij.

The *Savoy* Regiment was instead in charge of holding back the enemy between Valle Kriuscha and Valle Zuzkan facing north-east.

3<sup>rd</sup> - At this point Major Fellmer pointed out to me that the intention of Heeresgruppe "B" was not to rectify the salient of Jagodnyi and to do everything possible to keep the enemy from Tschebotarewskij descending towards Bolschoj.

I replied to the aforementioned officer that I did not have enough troops to keep this defensive flank as it was and to oppose, at the same time, the enemy on the director Tschebotarewskij - Bolschoj. However, I resumed the matter while I confirmed the order of the two cavalry regiments to perform the task previously assigned to them.

Given the desire of Heeresgruppe "B" and the fact that the movements should have been done at night and therefore in rather difficult conditions, and given that the enemy had slowed his pressure, I suspended the execution of the correction. At the same time, to meet the desire expressed by the aforementioned Heeresgruppe, I arranged for the *Novara* Regiment, reinforced by a battery, to stand against the enemy descending from the north along the Zuzkan valley, possibly supporting on the left elements of the XVII Corps. Germanic.

At the same time, I confirmed the order to the *Savoy* Regiment to oppose the advance of enemy elements between the two Balkes Kriuscha and Zuzkan.

The few elements of infantry and artillery were meanwhile moved towards Gorbatowskij to constitute a cornerstone there.

The order to continue to detain the enemy by bending along the north-south axis (Val Zuzkan), brought by General Barbò, reached *Novara* when it was already halfway between Bolschoj and Gorbatowskij, while one of its squadrons he was still seriously committed at Bolschoj.

General Barbò, given the precarious conditions of men and horses, considered it appropriate to continue the regiment to Gorbatowskij to be able to restore the men and water the horses with the intention, after a few hours of rest, to make him resume the march for Val Zuzkan for the fulfillment of the task entrusted to him. In fact, at about 23:00, the *Novara* has reversed the march in spite of the visible fatigue of men and horses, towards Val Zuzkan.

Of all this, as the events unfolded, Major Fellmer was kept constantly informed, which, in turn,

has kept the XVII C.A. Germanic and the Major of G.S. Gyldenfeld - Liaison Officer to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command.

The same Major Fellmer has informed me that the provisions given by me, given the situation, were to be considered fully satisfactory.

Document n. 78.

PHONOGRAM

August 26, 1942

*From the Command XXXV Corps. (C.S.I.R.)  
To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command*

No. 9627/Op. stop 26 August at 07:00 Reference your no. 02/2896 of 25 August stop I ask to know the reasons for the passage of dependence of the sector formally of the *Sforzesca* to the XVII Corps German stop In this regard, I note that in the aforementioned sector, in addition to what remains of the *Sforzesca* division and the *Celere* division, there are currently almost all the troops of the Corps stop General *Messe*

Document n. 79.

PHONOGRAM

August 26, 1942

*From the Command XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.)  
To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command*

No. 9628/Op. stop 26 August at 07:00 I am informed that a colonel of the XVII Corps presented at the *Sforzesca* Division Command tonight at 02:00 stating to precede the Commander of the Corps who would have gone there on the spot within a few hours. Said Colonel has directly communicated the passage of dependence of the sector from one to another of the Corps attributing immediate effects, he explained the point of view of his Command regarding the employment of the troops of the division and of the *Celere* and urged immediate executive provisions stop I note that the phonogram 02/2896 of this Command reserves the right to clarification and above all fails to indicate the day and time of the transfer of responsibility of the sector formally *Sforzesca* from one to the other Corps stop Waiting for this I consider all the troops of the sector as still at my orders stop General *Messe*

Document n. 80.

PHONOGRAM

26 August 1942 – 08:30

*From 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command  
To Command XXXV Army Corps– CSIR*

Effective immediately, all units located between the current sector boundary between 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Army & highway Bokovskaja - Jelanskoje are transferred to the XVII Corps. These units are: *Sforzesca* Division, *Celere* Division, as well as Italian Army and Army troops and German troops (179<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment). The task of the XVII Corps is to prevent, as per the orders of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Command, an enemy breakthrough in the direction of Perelasovski - Bokovskaja and to stop at all costs the withdraw movements of the *Sforzesca* Division.

Document n. 81.

COMMAND 3<sup>rd</sup> CELERE DIVISION  
“PRINCIPE AMEDEO DUCA D'AOSTA”  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

No. 2/3937/Op. of prot.

P.M. 40, on 27 September 1942. XX

*Subject:* Divisional dependence.

*To the Command of the XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.)*

Following a verbal request, I provide the following clarifications about my course of action following the XVII Corps on 27 August u.s. transmitted to this command with sheet 2/3675 of 6 September.

Received the order of operation according to which the *Celere* Division should have passed to the orders of the General Group Blumentritt, I reserved the right to examine my position in relation to the degree and seniority of the aforementioned General.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> in the afternoon hours General Blumentritt came to the headquarters of this Command to make contact and ask about the situation.

Noticing that he was a Brigadier General, I immediately pointed out to him - before he came into the matter - that I am General of Division

the order given by the XVII Corps could not have been implemented and that I did not intend to depend on him.

The General told me that he had received orders from his superiors and that anyway he would immediately have proposed to the Commander of the XVII Corps in question why it was clarified. However, he asked to be informed about the current tactical situation.

The Official interpreter who accompanied him made it clear that General Blumentritt was to be considered the spokesman of General Hollidt and that the orders were then given in the name of his Excellence the Commander of the Corps.

I replied that I took note of this clarification, but I wanted the situation of dependence to be clearly specified in an order.

Having said that, I do not object that he should take a view of our situation. After hearing about the situation, General Blumentritt went to the divisional observatory and then returned to Gorbatowo in the evening where he had set up his Command post.

No order issued either in his name or in the name of XVII Corps.

At 21:00 I sent to the XVII Corps the phonogram that I enclose in a copy with which I asked that it be officially sanctioned that the division depended directly on the Command of the Corps and that General Blumentritt only had to consider himself a liaison officer.

The question was not followed because at 05:30 on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August the order of this command was received with which it was announced that the division sector immediately returned to the orders of the XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.).

The General of Division  
Commander  
*Mario Marazzani*

Document n. 82.

VERBALIZATION TELEPHONE COMMUNICATION  
BETWEEN Lt. COL. CONTI  
Chief of Operations of the XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.)  
and Lt. COL. Bonzani  
of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command

P.M. 88, on 30 August 1942. XX – 20:00

It is necessary on 1 September to *do an action* with the aim of making a more secure connection with the Germans (79<sup>th</sup> Germanic division on the right).

The orders given by the Group “B” are the following:

*1 September 05:00 hours: combined action between XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.) and 79<sup>th</sup> Germanic division.*



The 79<sup>th</sup> Germanic division has for objective the heights of hill 220 and hill 206.3; once the hills have been taken, the Germans continue with the tanks and go towards Kotowskij (from hill 206.3).

The XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.) has as its objective the ridge that starts from hills 226.7 and 228.0 and goes to connect with the town of Kotowskij (make connection to Kotowskij - northern part + hill 2.0); the town of Kotowski it is to us including.

All the action will be preceded by bombardment of Germanic aviation. In this regard, the XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.) says to the Army or directly to XVII Corps (through the Germanic Connection Office) the areas and objectives to be beaten and the line from which we start (indicate well advanced elements with the yellow sheets).

The action must begin 05:00 hours (radio time) to take advantage of the action of the first air raid. Our advance from Bolschoj to Kotowski may be delayed to give time to the Germanic action on the right to make its weight felt.

What matters is that the action from left to right is supported by a strong artillery mass. The Army gives the availability of all the armored Bns. that can be used in mass to save lives.

The essential thing is to act of speed and surprise.

The above is a notice to give time to the XXXV Corps (C.S.I.R.) to take all the predispositions.

Document n. 83.

#### PHONOGRAM

August 31, 1942

*From the Command XXXV Army Corps – CSIR*

*To the Pasubio Division Command*

*To the Celere Division command*

*To the Sforzesca Division Command*

*and, for knowledge:*

*To the Command 8<sup>th</sup> Army*

*To the 3 Gennaio CC.NN. Grouping Command*

*To the Horse Grouping Command*

*To the Artillery Command of the Corps.*

*To the Corps Engineer Command*

N. 10,000/Op. day 31 August 1942 – 15:00 hours *stop*

Purpose to improve and consolidate our positions in correspondence limits contact with XVII Germanic Army Corps will be carried out tomorrow September 1<sup>st</sup> combined action to assure possession hills 226.7 - 228 - north inhabited edge Kotovski - hill 206.3 - hill 217.4 *stop*

*Sforzesca* Division with Horse Grouping and reinforced by 6<sup>th</sup> Alpine (minus a battalion) - one company "L" tank (minus one platoon) -

a flame throwing platoon, with convergent action hill 226.7 and from Bolshoi, will have to take possession of the ridge hill 228.0 - Kotovski (inhabited area included) forming fire base on southeastern spur hill 226.7 to protect left flank *stop* attack column at the same time XVII Germanic Army Corps will attack from south - east to north - west to first seize the heights of hill 217.4 and 206.3 and then point with armored formations from the north-east on Kotovski *stop* Start attack 05:00 hours *alt*

Direct action from Bolshoi on Kotovski will be facilitated by reverse threat on Kotovski exercised by the above formations *stop* *Sforzesca* Division will keep link with the XVII Germanic Army Corps along line hill 188.0- + 1.6 - + 2.0 *stop* Attack will be preceded by aerial bombardment that will beat pre-established targets *stop*

Action must be of a decision and surprise nature and must be supported by as many batteries as possible. Our advanced elements must be marked with yellow sheets and white sheets arranged in letter "T" *stop* All other troops deployed and not directly affected will develop intense exploration action with robust patrols and will remain in condition, if enemy fall back, to exploit success until the occupation of the south heights Don *stop* *Sforzesca* Division will press opponent with all his strength until reaching the front slopes east hill 232.2 - crossroads hill 193.7 and note north - west heights hill 213.3 *stop* The action must proceed in full harmony and connection with the left XVII German Army Corps *stop* *Celere* Division will do the same for Jagodni direction - hill 211.8 & for q. 208.4 - q. 197,2 gravitating with forces on his left with the goal line crest between crossroads at the north hill 232.2 - crossroads hill 197.2 & spur that descends towards north - west on Nizne Krivskoi *stop*

Right wing *Pasubio* will accompany *Celere* left movements to achieve front adjustment on line hill 168.0 - inhabited Nizne Krivskoi (inclusive) *stop* Sectoral limit between XVII Germanic Army Corps and XXXV Army Corps - CSIR: Blinoff - Kotovski - Deviatkin - Cebotarevski (inhabited by XXXV) - confluence Koper *stop*

General *Messe*

Document n. 84.

VERBALIZATION TELEPHONE CONVERSATION  
BETWEEN COL. UTILI AND GEN. PELLEGRINI

P.M. 88, on 31 August 1942. XX

Battalion. Alpine "Vestone" looking at his side with a push towards Scach n. 4 with another company on the reverse of 195.8 not worrying about the elements of Scach n. 3. Action supported by 7 batteries (I/17<sup>th</sup> - II/17<sup>th</sup> & bty 75/32).

Battalion. Alpine "Val Chiese" with a company from the north-west basin on hill 193.8 - another company from 188 on 1.8 & Kotowskij.

At the end connection by road between Kotowskij and Kulmykowskij and occupation from 228.0 to the North houses of Kotowskij at the head of the balke that descend on balka Scach n. 4.

Action of the Bn. "Val Chiese" supported by III/17<sup>th</sup> and by Group Borghini (a bty in Bolschoj) 2 pieces at hill 1.8.

Tank locations:

2 platoons. plus 2 tanks reserve at hill 228.0 available to Col. Signorini 6<sup>th</sup> Alpine Commander;

1 pl. the more the tank reserves to Bolschoi available to Pagliano, the task of making maximum resistance and exploitation successful;

1 co. motorcyclist available Barbò, tactical connection task and successful exploitation.

\* \* \*

His Excellence informed of the above observations:

1st - *Novara* Cavalry Regiment held ready to carry out round-up sweep.

2<sup>nd</sup> - Kotowskij town sweep can also be done without tanks.

3<sup>rd</sup> - He wants to know the command post division Sforzesca, Gen. Vaccaro and Gen.

Barbò

4<sup>th</sup> - The defensive side must be done with the III/54<sup>th</sup>. Nothing forbids to send to Ferma n. 4 a platoon of the Bn. "Vestone".

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All the aforementioned observations have been communicated personally to Gen. Pellegrini by the Chief of the G.S. at 15:00.

SFORZESCA INFANTRY DIVISION (2<sup>nd</sup>) COMMAND  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF G.S. - SEC. OP. AND SERVICE

*Urgent. Secret.*

N. 1/1482/OP. of Prot.

P.M. 69, on 31 August 1942. XX – 17:30

*Subject:* Occupation of the ridge from hill 228.0 descends on Kotowskij (inhabited area inclusive).

*To the Commander Horse Troops Grouping  
To the Commander Sforzesca Infantry Division  
To the 6<sup>th</sup> Alpine Regiment Commander  
To the Divisional Artillery Commander  
To the Divisional Engineer Commander  
and, for knowledge:  
To the Commander XXXV Corps - C.S.I.R.  
To the Commander 79<sup>th</sup> Germanic Division*

ORDER OF OPERATIONS No. 5

Tomorrow, September 1st, at 5 am, will take place, in cooperation with the XVII Corps Germanic, the action for the occupation of the ridge that goes from 228.0 to Kotowskij (inhabited area included).

To confirm verbal agreements and then precise orders of the command XXXV Corps - C.S.I.R., I have:

1<sup>st</sup> - Vestone alpine battalion, reinforced by the flamethrower platoon, starting from hill 228.0 points on the reversals of hill 195.8 and occupy the spur that dominates the village of Kotowskij from the west.

2<sup>nd</sup> - "Val Chiese" Alpine Battalion moving from the positions of hill 188.8 points on Kotowskij and occupy the spur that dominates this village from the north-west; with other elements moving from Bolschoj in the direction of hill 195.8 make contact with the Alpine battalion "Vestone" which circumvents that height from the north.

3<sup>rd</sup> - The action of the two Alpine battalions and of the reinforcing elements will be coordinated by General Barbò.

4<sup>th</sup> - Artillery:

- will act in support of the Alpine battalion "Vestone" the I and II group of the 17<sup>th</sup> Regt. art. Inf. Div.. Fire requests directly from the commander of the Bn. alpine "Vestone" to group commanders;  
- will act in support of the Bn. "Val Chiese" the group on horseback "Borghini" and the III/17<sup>th</sup> Regt. art. Inf. Div.. Fire demands by commander "Novara" lancers regiment.

5<sup>th</sup> - tanks:

- 2 pl. and two reserve tanks in the area of hill 228.0 available commander 6<sup>th</sup> Regt. Alpine;

- 1 pl. and two reserve tanks in the Bolschoj area at the disposal of the commander the "Novara" lancer regiment,  
Assignment;  
- breaking down any resistances;  
- exploitation of success.

6<sup>th</sup> - Co. Bersaglieri motorcyclist available General Barbò with the task of armed connection and exploitation of success.

7<sup>th</sup> - The 54<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt. with the help of elements of the alpine troop "Vestone" ensure the left flank of the Bn itself forming a base of fire on the spur immediately north of hill 228.0.

I assign for this task ½ company 47/32 anti-tank that will reach the III/54 ° area by this evening.

8<sup>th</sup> - The action will be preceded by aerial bombardment at altitude. The starting base for the attachment and the subsequent lines reached must be indicated by means of yellow or white sheets arranged so as to form the letter "T" with the transversal side parallel to the line.

I remember the absolute necessity that the sheets are exposed only by the most advanced troops.

9<sup>th</sup> - All the other troops of the sector remain in place ready to move in a north - east direction for possible exploitation of success. I send strong patrols to test opponent's attitude.

10<sup>th</sup> - Wire and radio connections: those in progress.

11<sup>th</sup> - Command post: Gorbatoowo.

The General Commander  
*Carlo Pellegrini*

Document n. 86.

#### RECORDING

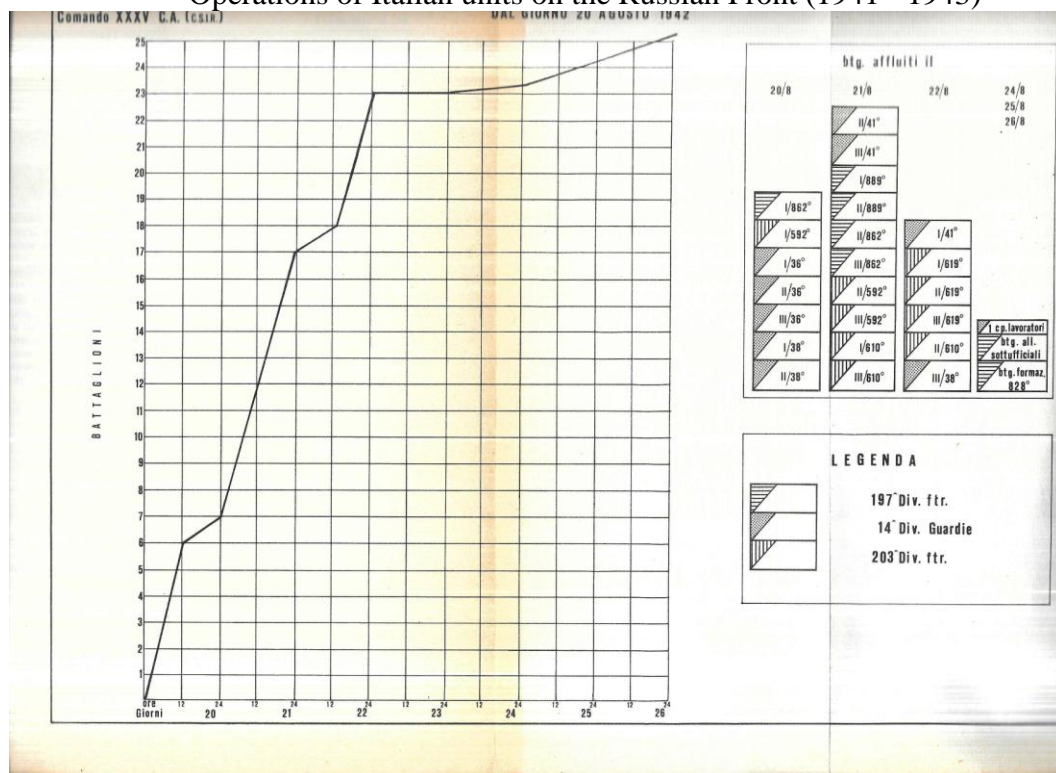
P.M. 88, on 2 September 1942. XX

Mounted group command communicates at 07:50 hours

Col. Pagliano sent his officer this morning to make connections with the German troops; said Officer has found that the Germans have returned to their starting positions, ie they no longer occupy hill 206.3 and probably not even hill 220.0.

It has also been made clear that contrary to the information given yesterday repeatedly repeated, the town of Kalmykowskij (I say not) was ever occupied by the Germanic troops which penetrated only in the first houses to the north-east of that town. Currently the hill 188.0 is guarded by the *Novara* and on the same level there is a Germanic element that acts as a link with the right or with hill 219.5 *stop* General *Barbò*

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Document n. 88.

PHONOGRAM

*From the Command XXXV Corps. (C.S.I.R.)  
To the Sforzesca Division Command  
To the Tridentine Division Command  
and, for knowledge:  
To the Horse Grouping Command*

September 5, 1942

No. 10338/Op. stop 5 September - at 5.00 pm stop Purpose to cover the supply road of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army precise my directives defense Sforzesca sector stop 1<sup>st</sup>) Organize Bolschoj defense with character stronghold able to sustain itself with own means that will have to be increased maximum measure practically achievable stop 2<sup>nd</sup>) 2 °) To attribute the remaining portion of the defensive curtain functions between Bolschoj and Jagodnyi to be kept to the same extent both to insure the left flank Bolschoj and to use it as a starting point counterattack attacking enemy flank Bolschoj stop At confirms what is defined verbally with General Barbò & Chief General Staff and to count as a basis for starting action counterattack enemy flank that attacked Bolschoj stop At confirms what is defined verbally with General Barbò and Chief of Staff Sforzesca I order: command Bolschoj stronghold is assumed by General Barbò, garrison is soon reinforced by the 1<sup>st</sup> motorcycle company and a battery of 75/32, Tridentina division draws from 6<sup>th</sup> alpine traffics at least 50 men to be assigned as complements at the alpine company "Val Chiese" more proven, Bn. "Verona" will take material contact with Bolschoj garrison troops deploying two companies in the line stop General Messe

Document n. 89

COMMAND XXXV ARMY CORP (C.S.I.R.)  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

No. 10451/Op. of prot.

P.M. 88, September 7, 1942. XX

*Subject:* Bolschoj defense sector.

*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command  
Operations Office*

P.M. 6

Phonogram reference 02/3242 on the current date 5, I consider it appropriate to represent the following about the delicacy of the Bolschoj area, of the suture between 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Army, and the possibility of creating in correspondence of said zone a robust stronghold able to sustain itself with its own means:

1. - the locality in question is tactically the most unsuitable for an autonomous defense to the bitter end for the width of the Zuzkan Valley, for the extension of the inhabited area, for the reciprocal distance and the intrinsic weakness of the surrounding topographic supports to which the defense framework;

2. - the most important of the natural supports is the noted hill 195.8 strongly guarded by the enemy, whose possession would greatly improve the tactical situation, however, as already demonstrated by the fighting of the 1<sup>st</sup> September, this occupation involves a combined action from the East with the Germans with the use of armored vehicles to support the infantry;

3. - to the east of Bolschoj the XVII Corps, besides not adhering to my explicit request to occupy with its troops hill 188 which is part of its sector, was forced to transfer to another sector the third battalion of 212<sup>th</sup> and a heavy battery located in the area hill 219.5 and south hill 223. This Command has had, in spite of itself, maintained on hill 188 a squadron reinforced by 1 machine-gun platoon and 1 anti-tank platoon.

In the current conditions to ensure the assigned functions to Bolschoj, it would be necessary to use them, and at least to strongly affect the two battalions still available in the 5<sup>th</sup> regiment of the Alps which constitute the only reserve available to the Corps to counter-maneuver over 60 km in front.

Given the general situation, in order to give greater substance to the defense of Bolschoj, I have arranged:

- the reinforcement of that garrison with 1 motorcycle company and 1 75/32 battery;
- a greater connection between the defensive curtain of Jagodnyj - Bolschoj and the defense of Bolschoj;
- a reinforcement of men to the already proven company of the battalion "Val Chiese";
- finally that the command of the forces in Bolschoj is assumed by General Barbò.

Despite these measures it is certain that Bolschoj's defense is not such as to guarantee it in the front from an attack launched by the enemy with preponderant forces. I must also insist that the weak occupation of hill 188.0, the subtraction of forces from the extreme left by the XVII Corps create a very dangerous emptiness to the east of Bolschoj which increases its chances of turning.

General of the Army Corps  
Commander  
*Giovanni Messe*



Document n. 90.

COMMAND XXXV ARMY CORPS  
(C.S.I.R.)  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

No. 10602/Op. of prot.

P.M. 88, September 9, 1942. XX

*Subject:* 3rd *Celere* division «P.A.D.A. ».

*To the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army*  
*Operations Office*

P.M. 6

The *Celere* division after almost two months of uninterrupted fighting, has practically exhausted (except the Command and the artillery) its every fighting ability.

The overall strength of the seven Bersaglieri battalions slightly exceeds two thousand men; after deducting the indispensable services and ancillary activities, very little remains - numerically - of the fighting force.

But this is not the most serious problem.

Due to the high percentage of losses in combat, the classification has lost substantially all its strength, whereas in the current circumstances it would be more than ever indispensable.

The troops, feverish and exhausted, you could see a true collapse of muscular and above all nervous energy; engaged several times in a row with unparalleled generosity, he has funded his last reserves and there is absolutely no expectation of a rapid recovery.

It is my opinion that we need to openly acknowledge this state of affairs, accepting all the consequences.

The division can no longer be used either for the defense or for the offensive.

The battalions must be removed from the front, even for our prestige because they make a number without corresponding performance; they can increase the magnitude of losses but without any operational effectiveness.

It is not the case, however, to renounce, for the time being, the artillery assistance, excellent and from the operational point of view.

On the other hand, the general situation on the front of the Corps does not allow to recover from another sector forces corresponding to the needs of the gap that would be created with the retreat of the *Celere* battalions; much less then in view of a next counter-offensive operation to drive the enemy beyond the Don, an operation that to give success can not be separated from the use of fresh forces.

This premise, I see no other solution than to ask for the availability of the Alpine division “*Cuneense*”; an alpine regiment could be sufficient for the moment; but the integral solution would be more rational, more organic and above all definitive in relation to all possible eventualities,

It could also be a prelude to the temporary withdrawal of the *Sforzesca* division, which in the general interest is urgently needed to reorganize as soon as possible and which in the current situation is not able to effectively perform such delicate and complex work.

General of the Army Corps  
Commander  
*Giovanni Messe*

Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)





Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

TRA DERESOVKA E SVINJUKA

rvazione Aerea Italiano)

DOCUMENTO N. 91



OKH - GEN. ST D H - OP ABT (1)

*Secret.*

N. 420 S17 / 42 g. Kdos.

October 14, 1942

Zu Heeresgruppe B / Ia N. 3418/42 g. Kdos.

OPERATING ORDER NO. 1

The summer and autumn campaign of 1942 is over. Some action is still ongoing. Others of a local nature still foreseen, will follow.

Great successes have been achieved. With a formidable offensive, the enemy has been driven back to the Caucasus and the Don, and the land links between central Russia and the Caucasus area of vital importance for the further conduct of the war have been cut off altogether. On the rest of the front all the Russian lightning offensives have been cut short with a minimum of our forces, inflicting serious, bloody losses on the enemy.

The evidence given by Commands and troops in the struggles of this summer and autumn is worthily reminiscent of the campaigns of the war years. already passed. They give us the sure guarantee that the German people will be able to trust in the future and in every event of their Army.

The winter campaign is upon us. On the eastern front, the task, with the exception of operations still underway or planned, of defending at all costs the lines reached against any attempt to break the opponent.

Preparations for the winter campaign are in full swing. The second Russian winter will find us ready and better prepared.

The Russians, whose forces are very weakened by the last fighting, will no longer be able to put on line during the winter of 1942/43, the personnel who had mobilized in the previous winter campaign. Whatever happens, a harder and harsher winter can not pass.

I require all the Commands and Commanders to complete as soon as possible, taking care of every detail, the winter preparations to give the troops not only the bases and premises for the fulfillment of his duties, but also to offer the best soldiers possible living conditions during the winter period. To this end it is necessary to bear in mind that it is not enough to have provided for the necessary requests to the Higher Commands; instead, each commander must do his best to help himself with improvisations and circumstantial means designed to endow his troops with all possible facilities.

I myself, with vast and opportune measures, will arrange for the necessary reinforcements to arrive to the fighting troop so that in the coming winter the soldiers, who have been continuously working for over a year and a half in line, can alternate to enjoy a temporary rest.

I wait from the Commands and troops that they face the winter campaign 1942/43 with full confidence in their own strength and that they are aware of the conquering victories,

they know how to batter and destroy with indomitable will also in this winter campaign the enemy, whenever he should try to attack our front.

The following maximums should apply:

1. - The winter defense line must be kept in any case.
2. - Everywhere we will practice an active defense that will not leave truce to the enemy to deceive our intentions.
3. - To enemy attacks it will not be possible to react by subtracting from the action or by implementing operational folds.
4. - Local infiltrations are promptly eliminated in assaults or with counter-attack actions.
5. - Open breaches are contained, while the positions of our front remained intact must be defended at any cost to serve as starting points for countermeasures to be implemented.
6. - Formations left detached or surrounded will defend themselves to the bitter end until their release.

The Commanders will personally answer me for the execution of these orders.

In particular, I have:

I) *Course of the definitive winter resistance line.*

Heeresgruppe B: Jaschkul (280 km west of Astrakhan) - along the heights to the north to the Volga - Stalingrad - current front of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army - 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army - 2<sup>nd</sup> Hungarian Army and 2<sup>nd</sup> German Army.

Also the points, from which local forward movements are planned to improve our positions, will have to be immediately fixed in defense. They will later serve as second-line positions.

II) *Arrangement of the resistance line.*

- a) The works of accommodation must be completed, on the whole, before the beginning of the frost. All means are used to reach this goal even where little has been done so far. The online troop must be supported largely by labor recruited by the services. Without any regard, prisoners of war, local elements and even women should be used to work on the planned works to the rear. The inventive spirit and improvisation by the troops are valued by all means by superior commands. Particular experiences on individual sectors of the front must be immediately brought to the attention of the other sectors. Everyone must strive to do his best, without waiting for special orders or orders from above.
- b) The commands of the resistance line keep in mind that rivers, lakes and swamps do not constitute obstacles during the winter period and that they facilitate the enemy in his aggressive intentions. Because of the improved transitability of usually impassable terrain, *the creation and employment of an unbroken line of resistance is even more important than in the summer.* To this end, it will be necessary to prepare and build heating provisions located outside the inhabited areas. The inconvenience must not be repeated due to the necessity for the troops to defend themselves from the cold by crossing each individual inhabited.

- c) The experience made in the last winter shows that *the positions built in the snow* have often become very useful. These are easy preparations that are used to strengthen the positions in the ground prepared before the beginning of frost.
- d) *The use of mines* in front of the line will have to be considerably intensified. Keep in mind, however, that frost and snow make mined fields ineffective, and they must therefore be implemented and implemented in such a way as to allow constant monitoring of their efficiency. In addition, additional barriers of supplementary mines are set up to be constructed after the start of frost or snowfall.  
Particular importance must also be attached to the construction of minefields on the back of the resistance line. These minefields, if well arranged, offer the possibility of locating enemy infiltrations, making more effective the action of our reaction weapons.
- e) When safety against attacks with tanks can not be achieved by a convenient layout of the resistance line, other A/T obstacles must be built in addition to minefields of any kind. Artificially frozen slopes have been demonstrated in such points on the front. In a short time it will be possible to have an excellent A/T obstacle.
- f) Special care and attention must be paid to the snow plow tools available so that it is possible to keep clear not only the main roads but also the communication ways that guarantee the mobility of troops and heavy weapons such as for example. tanks, assault pieces, A/T guns, etc.

### III) *Conduct of war and use of troops.*

- a) Abstraction - made for some specific exceptions, the Eastern Front army will perform purely defensive duties during the winter, but this does not mean that they are of a passive nature. Rather, the reaction must be very active and be carried out in *continuous actions* of patrols in the offensive exploitation of favorable opportunities and in the efforts of not giving respite to the enemy, inflicting him always new losses. Only with such an active defense system will it be possible to re-energize the offensive momentum again and the sense of superiority over the Russian of which the Germanic soldier is soaked, thus reinforcing confidence in our own troops. At the same time the enemy will be prevented or made difficult to take action by taking the initiative.
- b) In relation to what has been said, *exploratory* activities must be carried out with all available means. Only through the results provided by the exploration that will be interested in what happens not only on enemy lines but also in the enemy hinterland an updated picture of the enemy situation will be available, promptly detecting enemy offensive intentions that will cause corresponding countermeasures.
- c) *Of decisive character* to the effects of the employment of the troops are the matters inherent to the preservation of the fighting force of the men in line in the winter months as well as a deployment that will make impossible any Russian attempt to break our line of resistance.

- d) Once again the importance to be attributed to an uninterrupted *line of resistance is emphasized*. Only in this way will it be possible to prevent the enemy from being able to creep in at first with weak forces on our front to establish themselves immediately with reinforcements that he, as we know from experience, immediately flows on the spot.
- e) As has already been arranged several times, the *reserves* must be distributed in such a way as to be in the immediate vicinity of the resistance line so that they can, in case of enemy infiltration, *promptly switch* to counterattack. In winter this will be possible only if the reserves can have on the presumable lines of action the necessary means of transport that must be kept constantly in full efficiency.
- f) Particular importance must also be attributed to the availability of anti-tank weapons made mobile during the winter (already prepared).
- g) Forming *mobile units in winter*, in compliance with the orders already issued in this regard, please note that it is better to equip modest well-trained ski training rather than to form numerically strong formations whose training in the combat on skis is not sufficiently advanced.
- h) The *replacement* of online formations will have to be made possible even where there is no unity of any importance to facilitate the rotation. For this purpose the *Alarmeinheiten* (a kind of intervention unit) will be deployed referred to in «grundl. Befehl Nro I », temporarily employing them on the front. Even if this only made it possible to replace small contingents, the troops will not fail to show gratitude, while on the other hand it will be possible to tighten the ties between the front and the backward units. Other expedients to replace only small contingents of fighters at the front will be easily found. In addition to this, the divisions that are currently deployed on particular sectors of the front with others in line with sectors that have remained calmer will be largely upgraded.
- i) *Formations coming in winter from the metropolitan area* or from the west, as well as the additions completed in winter must not be used, if the situation permits, immediately on the front line. Instead, it will be necessary to give them the chance to acclimatize themselves to the Russian winter and to get used to the particular conditions of the combat connected to it.
- k) During the winter months every superior is doubly obliged to take an interest in the *spiritual and material assistance* of his troops. Any proposals for improvement and initiatives in this sense must be represented as soon as possible and without laborious treatment by higher commands, the Supreme Army Command, because a useful help will be effective only in the case that it can arrive immediately and not after some months.
- l) Particular attention should be paid to the conservation of *precious draft animals and vehicles*. In the vicinity of the front the number of draft animals strictly necessary in the interests of the operations must be retained. All others are withdrawn and set aside in areas where they can be better cared for and supplied.



IV) *Provisions already issued* to the conduct of the winter war. It's a matter of:

- a) Crudsätzlicher Führerbefehl über die *Aufgaben der Verteidigung* (OKH/Gen. St.d.H./Op.abr.(1) Nr. 11 153/42 g.K.vom 11.9.42).
- b) Ausbau der *Winterstellungen* (OKH/Gen. St.d.H./Op.abt. (Ia) Nr. 420 587/42 g. K. Ch. vom 9.8.42).  
Soweit die darin genannte Winterstellung von Ziffer 1.) abweicht, ist Ziffer 1.) maßgebend.
- c) Ausbau von *Riegelstellungen und befestigten Räumen* im ruckwärtigen Gebiet (OKH/Gen. St.d.H./Op.abt. (Ia) Nr.420 210/42 g.K. Ch. vom 26.4.42).
- d) Einsatz der *Zivilbevölkerung* zum Stellungsbau (OKH/Gen. St.d.H./Op.abt. (I) Nr. II 051.42 g.K. vom 30.8.42).
- e) Schaffung *Fertigbarer Unterstütmöglichkeiten* für Panzer und Kraftfahrzeuge (OKH/Gen. St.d.H./Op. Abt. (I) Nr. II 208/42 g.K. vom 18.9.42).
- f) Schaffung von Abstellräumen für Kraftfahrzeuge (OKH/Gen. St.d.H./Op. Abt, (I) Nr. II 289/42 g.K. vom 30.9.42).
- g) Richtlinien für *Wintervorbereitungen* (Anlage 3 zu OKH/Gen. St.d.H./Gen. Qu./Op. Abt. (V) Nr. 50 213/42 g.K. vom 9.9.42).
- h) Abwehr feindlicher *Luftlandungen* (OKH / Gen. St.d.H./Op.Abt. (I) Nr. II 302/42 g.K. vom 1.10.42).
- i) Bildung von winterbeweglichen *Jagdkommandos* (OKH/Gen. St.d.Hv/Op.Abt. (1) Nr. II 058/42 geh.v. 31.8.42).
- j) Richtlinien für die *Ausbildung* im Winter 1942/43 (OKH / Gen. St.d.H.Abt. (Ia) Nr. 3000/42 geh. vom 21.9.42).

V) *Reports.*

In addition to the reports referred to in point IV), I will request from time to time other reports reflecting the progress made in the refurbishment work, the use of troops, reserves, etc., on individual divisional sectors.

If, for the moment is renounced, the monthly presentation of maps 1:100,000 relating to the divisional sectors, it is trusted in the incessant work of all the orders tending to comply with all orders and provisions issued by putting all available means at the service.

*Adolf Hitler*

8<sup>th</sup> ARMY COMMAND  
GENERAL STAFF - OFFICE OPERATIONS

Prot. N. 02/2086.

P.M. 6, on 6 August 1942. XX

*Subject:* Use of the Alpine Corps.

*To the Command of the Alpine Corps.  
To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Quartermaster  
To the Italian Connection office at the  
Army Group «B» Command*

Their offices

Agreements between the Duce and the Führer will lead the Alpine Corps to be used outside the Army in the Caucasus area.

Precise information on this subject is still lacking.

The Alpine Corps continues to gather in the area assigned to it by the Heeresgruppe "A" (Marshal von List, based in Stalino).

On the side of the Italian connecting group at the Army group "A", more southern discharge stations (Amvrosiewka - Uspenskaja) of the current assembly area were obtained, in order to bring it closer to that of employment.

I approve the constitution by the Army Quartermaster of the Delegation to be sent to the following of the Alpine Army Corps; it must be commensurate with the composition and supply of means to the needs of special supplies to which the German Quartermaster can not provide directly.

I also approve the establishment by the Cavallero connection unit of a sub-nucleus for the connection between the Alpine Corps and the German Command to which the Alpine Corps will operate.

The Command of the Alpine Corps will keep me informed of the orders it receives and of the operations taking place, while the Delegation of the Quartermaster and the sub-unit of connection will keep contact with the Army Quartermaster and the Cavallero Unit respectively.

Apart from the information that the Commander of the Alpine Corps will give me directly, the Quartermaster and the Cavallero unit will tell me the news of a certain importance that they should arrive in such a way that I can always be aware of the needs of the Alpine Army Corps and the carrying out of operations.

The daily communiqué to the Supreme Command also for the operations of the Alpine Army Corps will be made by this Command, to which the Alpine Corps will send the news for the hours 08:00 and 18:00 of each day.

In conclusion, while I see with pain the territorial Army Corps moving away from the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and making the best votes for its inevitable glories, I wish to keep it ethically tied to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army as an integral part of the Italian Armed Forces in Russia.

The designated General of the Army  
Commander  
*Italo Gariboldi*

Document n. 94.

PHONOGRAM

*Top secret.*

the n. 737/42 secret order.

*At the Alpine Corps Command*  
and, for knowledge:  
*Group of armies "B"*  
*1<sup>st</sup> Armored Army*  
*17<sup>th</sup> Army*

1. - The Italian Alpine Corps returns again under the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army.
2. - They are therefore to be put in motion from the zones currently reached:  
Div. "Tridentina" in Millerowo;  
Div. "Cuneense" in Starobielsk.
3. - The day of stopping ordered for the day 19 August 1942 is missing.
4. - Further orders from the armies group "B" (Starobielsk) leading the Alpine Corps to the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army.

Upper Command  
of the Armies Group "A"

Document n. 95.

MEMO  
FROM THE COMMANDER OF THE ALPINE ARMY CORPS  
TO THE COMMANDER OF THE 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY

P.M. 108, on 4 September 1942. XX

*Excellency;*

following the interview on August 30th with Your Excellency and on the basis of the first indirect news that came to me from the line, I think it is my duty to expose my thoughts as Commander of the Alpine Corps and more - as the Inspector of the specialty.

The Alpine Army Corps was set up to meet by the Italian G.S. to a specific request of the Germanic G. S. and its coming to Russia must therefore be related to a use as an Army Corps unit and not as Divisions, let alone as Battalions.

For this purpose the Army at home of the three Alpine Divisions was deprived with great sacrifice and the major unit was established to be able to make it work here as such.

On the other hand, the *Vestone* and *Val Chiese* Battalions of the *Tridentina* participated on day 1, isolated, to an action of partial rectification, wedged between troops of different possibilities and without the usual and indispensable support of their artillery.

The isolated *Vestone* pushed itself (as far as I have been told) so far that he arrived on the enemy artillery and then withdrew under a higher order.

Practically the action ended with poor results, while the following huge losses occurred between the two battalions: Officers 23, Non-commissioned officers 20, Alpini about 500.

Without taking into account the negative moral repercussions that may have had on the Alpine in this first contact with the enemy the abandonment of the positions reached, it is evident that with the repetition of such a use of isolated Battalions would be met:

a) to the wear and tear of the Battalions and with this to the wear and tear of the Divisions and consequently of the Alpine Army Corps without, as such, ever working;

b) to the danger of a moral depression of the units that are already inexplicable their destination in an area not suitable for their particular specialty equipment.

All this, in my view, as well as representing today a harmful renunciation of the possibilities of the Alpine Army Corps, will end up compromising its efficiency for the future.

I therefore beg your Excellency to want to avoid such a use of the units.

General *Gabriele Nasci*

Document n. 96.

COMMAND 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY  
GENERAL STAFF - OFFICE OPERATIONS

Prot. N. 02/3285.

P.M. 6, on 6 September 1942. XX

*Subject:* Use of C.A. unit Alpino.

*To his Excellency the Commander of the Alpine Corps*

I respond to the 4 September memo.

I understand the wish of the Commander of the Alpine Corps to have all his troops with him; it's natural. But I understand and very well also my responsibility as an Army Commander.

I do not know any provision that limits the use of the Alpine Corps, its divisions, its elements. On the contrary, I think that the alpine troops are the best suited for use for single units.

In any case, when the situation requires it, I firmly believe not only power but the duty to use what I have to hand. This is precisely the case that occurred.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Alpine battalions, employed, behaved well and their morale is very high.

When the “*Tridentina*” will be reunited, it will come back under its organic command.

The designated General of the Army  
Commander  
*Italo Gariboldi*

Document n. 97.

COMMAND 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY  
GENERAL STAFF - OFFICE OPERATIONS

Prot. N. 02/3522.

P.M. 6, on September 13, 1942. XX

*Subject:* Deployment and duties of the Alpine Corps.

*To the Alpine Army Corps Command*  
*To the Command II Army Corps*

1. - The Alpine Corps has to line up in the first half with the divisions “Julia” and “Cuneense” in the first row, in the sector now held by the 294<sup>th</sup> Germanic division that will pass in second row available to the Army, collecting

in the area of Ssudewka - Nikolajewka - Podgornoje and neighboring towns.

Towards the middle of October it is presumable that the limit of the sector of the Army will be brought to the mouth of the Bitiug river and then the Alpine Corps will have to guard the sector between the new northern boundary of the Army and the village of St. Kalitwa, including the "*Tridentina*" division, which in the meantime will be sent to the area.

It is necessary that Alpine Corps command, in deploying the divisions "*Julia*" and "*Cuneense*", keep in mind the final deployment that the Alpine Corps must assume, in order to minimize the displacement of units that must be done when the sector limits are changed.

II. - The on-line insertion of the G.U. must take place as soon as possible by single division.

Once the surveys have been completed, the "*Julia*" division will have to take part in its sector, followed by the "*Cuneense*" division as soon as it arrives in the area. The Germanic troops will be withdrawn as they are replaced by the troops of the two Alpine divisions.

To facilitate the operations of insertion the command of the Alpine Corps will take over the responsibility of the sector from the moment the first units move to replace the Germanic troops in line, taking over the operations of the Germanic division to its operations.

The Alpine Corps, in agreement with the command of the II Corps of the Army, will give notice of the day and time in which it will take over the sector.

The designated General of the Army  
Commander  
*Italo Gariboldi*

Document n. 98.

#### UPPER COMMAND ARMY GROUP B

the n. 4468/42 g.Kdos.

December 6, 1942

*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command*

1. - A successful enemy attack against the front of the Italian and Hungarian armies could have very serious operational consequences. It is known to me that all the measures taken by the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army Command have been taken to carry out a continuous reconnaissance of the enemy situation and to reinforce the defense potential of the front as far as possible.

Furthermore, the Supreme Command of the Army and the High Command of the Army Group have ordered the sending of several German units as

reinforcement for the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army. These formations that have already arrived are listed in the attached sheet.

2. - The use of part of these reinforcement formations has already been ordered by me in accordance with directives given to me by the Supreme Army Command. The remaining units must be - for the care of the Army Commander and local Commanders - employed or kept ready for use in order to achieve the maximum and fastest possible effect.

For this purpose it is necessary:

a) the bulk of the A/T available must be in the front or in the immediate vicinity. The A/T defense it will have to be reinforced in good time and to the disadvantage of other sectors as soon as indications are given of the imminent attack of enemy tanks;

b) all intervention reserves must be kept in the immediate vicinity of the front to allow their immediate intervention;

c) for all intervention reserves, all possible cases must be drawn up, not only by studying the various possibilities but also by practical work (keeping the roads free of snow, ensuring the functioning of the connections, sending first connection officers line, etc.) and ensuring that in case of enemy attacks we should not think long but act immediately and promptly;

d) issuing of unequivocal orders. The units employed in the front line will have to resist in any case even if they were to be encircled or bypassed. They will be freed from intervention reserves. Everyone must know that the abandonment of one's position means death or imprisonment, that is, even certain death. The reserve units will have to start the counterattack as soon as possible. It must be ensured that the reserves in the event of enemy attacks and increased artillery fire at the front are promptly alarmed and immediately prepared to be able to start the attack;

e) every commander must know that it will depend on his own quick and energetic action if an enemy raid can be cut off in the bud or if it develops into a break which can then be eliminated hardly or at all. Each commander must be aware of having full responsibility for his own sector;

f) every commander must know that it is not sufficient to have rejected the first attack. As is known, the Russians repeat their attacks persistently and for days without regard to human losses. It will therefore be of the utmost importance that the troops maintain the moral and physical forces to be able to endure extraordinary efforts over several consecutive days. It will have to do everything for their supply especially with reconstituting kinds.

3. - I would like to insist on continually reiterating the rules set out above for dependent commands.

*Freiherr von Weichs*

Attachment to f. n. Ia/4468/42 g.Kdos.

UPPER COMMAND ARMY GROUP B

*Excerpt.*

Ia n. 4448/42 g.Kdos.

December 5, 1942

*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command*

*I) The Supreme Command of the Army has issued the following order.*

*3. - Addition to the operational order n. 1.*

The order contained in the operating order n. 1 to maintain at all costs all positions even if these should be bypassed and in danger of being encircled, will and will almost always have as a result the formation of isolated bases which for a period or longer remain abandoned to themselves until they are freed.

These strongpoints already existing in all those points of the front in which there is not yet a continuous position of defense. Moreover, *all the settlements located in the front or in the immediate rear* - in the event of enemy attacks - can easily be cut off from their communications with the rear areas, thus assuming the characteristic of a strongpoint.

To maintain such strongpoints, an adequate supply of food and materials of all kinds is of decisive importance. It is not enough if these strongpoints have a stock for 8 - 10 days. Then, in the event of an encirclement, a critical situation will soon occur and the maintenance of the strongpoint will depend largely on the supply by air which is soon required.

This aviation supply - especially in winter - has great difficulty, especially if there is no possibility of landing within the radius of the strongpoint.

Moreover, these strongpoints must always be able to defend themselves in all directions. The necessary preparations must be arranged previously and not when the strongpoint is already encircled.

You order then:

1) all inhabited areas of any importance - but not only inhabited but also dominant heights, sections of positions, etc., which already can now be considered as strongpoints, which in the case of enemy actions can become encircled sites - must be provided with a stock of at least 8 weeks in relation to the strength of the garrison;

2) all these strongpoints must be arranged in such a way as to be able to defend themselves in all directions and for a rather long time.

II) .....

III) .....

Upper Command Army Group B



Document n. 99.

8<sup>th</sup> ARMY COMMAND  
GENERAL STAFF - OFFICE OPERATIONS

No. 02/7114.

P.M. 6, on December 15, 1942. XXI

*Subject:* Operational situation.

*To the Command of the Army Group B*  
(through the German General's office of connection to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command)

For five days the enemy has been attacking insistently.

It is to be expected that these attacks will continue and intensify. The troops resist and behave well. This is proof of the intact resistance line and the significant losses.

Given the extent of the front and the extent of the forces and the wear and tear given by the enemy and the season, the reserves are exhausted.

I must also add that fuel scarcity jeopardizes timely displacements and ammunition supplies that are not abundant.

The above is because this Command, knowing the exact situation of today and the predictable of tomorrow, can make the decisions that will believe the case because the fight is sufficiently nourished.

The General of the Army  
Commander  
*Italo Gariboldi*

Document n. 100.

PHONOGRAM  
ARMY GROUP B UPPER CONTROL

Ia n. 4502/42 g.Kdos.

8 December 1942 - 18.25 hours

*To the 8th Army Command*

1. - Revoking the previous order, the 385<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. upon arrival it will pass to the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army will have to be reunited as an intervention reserve in the area just south and southwest of Nowo Kalitwa.

2. - The division must be kept ready so that it can be used for the counter-attack - in the event of an enemy attack on the II Corps sector as well as in the area and to the north of the confluence of the Tschernaja Kalitwa - at the point where it will begin to emerge an enemy raid of a certain entity.

The order for such an action will give, without losing time to request authorization, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command with immediate notification to the Superior Command Army Group B.

In case of interruption of the connections, the Commander 385<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. is responsible for his division - on his own initiative - to be used quickly and in the most important point. To this purpose he will have to maintain a close contact with the 27<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div., with the II Corps and with the Alpine Corps (through the German Connection Commands), as well as with the *Cosseria* and *Cuneense* divisions, increasing the indications of enemy attack intentions will have to start their reconnaissance in good time.

3. - The probable directions of employment will have to be fixed by the 8th Army Command. They will have to be studied theoretically and practically on the ground by the 385<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. with all the framework. A common counterattack with the 27<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div. is possible. For this case, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command will issue further instructions.

4. - The 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command is responsible that the roads that must be traveled by the division in the fulfillment of its task are continually kept clear of snow and that for a possible use in the north of the Tschernaja Kalitwa a passage is created on the river near the front.

In addition, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army will provide - by concentrating and moving back the caravans of the divisions in position - to keep available the provisions necessary for the numerous horses, especially the artillery horse train, which after the necessary rapid readiness for the march of the division, they must be set aside much further, Mitrofanowka will have to be widely available for the division's needs.

5. - The immediate alarm of the division must be assured even in case of increased artillery fire at the front.

6. - The preparation and execution of the preparations as well as the instructions and orders issued by the 8<sup>th</sup> Army for a contemporary or common use of the 385<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. and the 27<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div.

Upper Command Army Group B

ENCODED TELETYPE

No. 02/6849.

December 9, 1942

*From 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command  
To Command II Corps  
Alpine Corps Command  
385<sup>th</sup> Germanic Div. Command  
(through the German General's office of connection to Command 8<sup>th</sup> Army)*

385<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division goes under the control of this command and must be located in the south and west of Nowo Kalitwa so that it can quickly rush into the II Corps and of Alpine Corps.

II Corps Command must ensure division arrangement in the established area.

Give basic constitution possibilities to Mitrofanowka.

Corps Command in collaboration with the division command, they will have to lend a division to the Tschernaja Kalitwa plain and also to the sectors of the *Cosseria* and *Cuneense* divisions. Subsequently, the study must also be extended to the *Ravenna* division sector.

Employment studies will have to be validated by reconnaissance and exercises with the cadres on the ground. .

Roads affected by the operational needs of the division must be kept free of snow.

The Alpine Corps will also look for a pass on Tschernaja Kalitwa to the division housing area.

Use division or its parts must be ordered by this command.

Only in the event of interruption of the connections of the east division authorized to act on his own initiative; for this purpose it must be connected to commands. The II Corps and Alpine and with *Cosseria* and *Cuneense* division.

The 385<sup>th</sup> division must be alerted as soon as enemy activity increases on the front even if only artillery. It must be kept informed of each new event by the Corps II and Alpine commands.

*Gariboldi*

PHONOGRAM

ARMY GROUP B HIGH COMMAND

Ia n. 4480/42 g.Kdos.

8 December 1942 - 4.20 pm

*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command*

The 27<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div. starting from December 9<sup>th</sup> 1942 it goes to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and will be sent to Bogutschar - Belikolodes - Kusrnenkoff. It must be ready to be able - in the event of an enemy attack in the sectors of II and XXXV Corps – to be immediately used for the counter-attack at that point in which an enemy raid of a certain entity occurs.

The order of intervention must be given without wasting time to request authorization directly from the Army with a simultaneous report to the Army Group B High Command.

In the event of interruptions in telephone communications, the commander of the 27<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div. is fully responsible for using his division on his own initiative and quickly in the most important point. To this purpose he maintains contact with the II and the XXXV Corps and with the German connection units near the divisions dependent on them and provides, with increasing evidence of an enemy attack, promptly to make their own surveys.

The most probable directions of employment will have to be fixed and treated theoretically and practically on the ground with all the frameworks. The practicability of the most important roads and bridges over Bogutschar must be provided. The division's prompt alarm must be ensured even in the event of increased artillery fire at the front.

Report the preparation and execution of the necessary preparations as soon as possible.

*Frhr. v. Weichs*

ENCODED TELETYPE

N. 02/6848.

December 9, 1942

From the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command

*To the II Corps Command*

*XXXV Corps*

*Army Engineers Command*

*27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division Command*

(through the German General's office of connection to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command)

and, for knowledge:

*To the Alpine Corps Command*

The 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division passes dependencies to this command and must move immediately to route Rossosch - Kantemirowka - Bytschek, in the area Bogutschar - Belikolodes - Kusmenkoff. Interested Corps in ensuring accommodation.

Corps Commands in collaboration with division command will want to lend division action on the lines Deresowka, Werch. Mamon, Bogutschar, Ogalew. Subsequently study will have to be extended to the whole sector of II and XXXV Corps. Employment studies should be validated reconnaissance and framework exercises on the ground.

It is necessary to keep the roads clear that the division must cover for operational needs. For this purpose, the Army Engineers Command immediately moves a snow-clearing team to II and XXXV Corps.

Use division or its parts will need to be ordered by this command. Only in case of interruption connections, commander of the division is authorized to act on initiative; for this purpose it must keep close connection with the Commands and II and XXXV Corps units.

Division must alert itself as soon as increased activity on the front, even if only artillery. It must be kept informed of every new event from commands II and XXXV Corps..

*Gariboldi*

Document n. 104.

ARMY GROUP B HIGH COMMAND

Ia n. 4577/42 g.Kdos.

December 15, 1942 – 10:30 hours

*To the 8th Army Command*

1 - In the event of an enemy break-through near the Cosseria division towards hill 190.7 to the south, which could not be manned with its own forces, the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division will have to be used for the counterattack. The time of the beginning of the attack as well as the strength of the troops to be employed must be established by the division commander, in agreement with the II Corps command and the German Liaison Officer Col. of the G.S.. Kinzel.

2. - After counterattacking, it will be necessary to move up all the German reserves and especially the 385<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Division behind the front to get them available as soon as possible.

3. - The 14<sup>th</sup> police regiment will have to be immediately sent to the 385<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and will be employed by the same. The use of the regiment can only take place in agreement with the Army B Group High Command.

*signed* Sup Command. Army Group B  
The Chief of Staff  
*von Sodenstern*

Document n. 105.

ARMY GROUP B HIGH COMMAND

Ia n. 4615/42 segr.

December 17, 1942

*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command*

With this I summarize all the decisions made during the day of December 17 on the further conduct of the actions at the Italian XXXV and II Corps:

1. - I repeat that all Italian units must be obliged to defend every palm of land and that the Italian dispersed formations belonging to the II Corps will have to be soon gathered, reorganized and sent to Taly available to Col. G.S. Kinzel.

2. - These forces must be deployed on the Bogutschar - Twjerdoklebowka - Zapkowo - Nowo Kalitwa line, prepared for further defense in the following manner:
  - a) on the right, in the area of Bogutschar - Twjerdoklebowka included, the 298<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division reinforced by all the available units of the *Ravenna* Div.;
  - b) on the left, in the sector south of Zapkowo up to Nowo Kalitwa, the 385<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division reinforced by all the available forces of the *Cosseria* Div..
3. - It will be the task of the 27th Armored Division (minus the parts attached to the 298<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div.) to cover the gap existing between the 298<sup>th</sup> Div. and the 385<sup>th</sup> Div.
4. - The parts of the Alpine Army Corps that must be sent with vehicles as quickly as possible, and soon all the *Julia* Division will have to be started via Sorkij up to the south wing of the 385<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. in such a way as to close the gap between Twjerdoklebowka and Belj Kolodes. In order to carry out the task assigned to them, they must, if necessary, attack.
5. - The SS oberführer Fegelein group (reinforced by the 15<sup>th</sup> motorized police Regt.) will have to be started via Kantemirovka - Taly, in the Bogutschar valley to the last possible limit in an easterly direction. His task will be to close for now the Bogutschar valley to the enemy infiltrated roughly at and to the north of Twjerdoklebowka and then to attack, depending on the development of the situation, alone or together with the Alpine Army Corps members arrived first to take possession of the defensive line set in point 2., then resisting on this line forming contact with the left wing of the 298<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div..
6. - The command over the entire sector between the mouth of the Bogutschar and the mouth of the Kalitwa will remain entrusted to the Command of the II Army Corps. Since this has moved back its command headquarters to Mitrofanowka over the years, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command will have to invest Col. Kinzel, still left in Taly, immediately with all the necessary powers so that he can direct the use and deployment of all new forces coming, in accordance with these orders.
7. - On the use of the 387<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. on arrival and further reinforcements, timely orders will be issued.
8. - It will be duty of the *Pasubio* Div. (XXXV Italian Army Corps) to maintain its current positions at all costs, because from unequivocal Germanic reports it appears that they have not been seriously attacked at any point. For this purpose the 526<sup>th</sup> Regt. reinforced will remain employed by the Inf. Division.

Frhr. v. Weichs

Document n. 106.

PHONOGRAM

No. 02/7266.

December 19, 1942

*From 8th Army Command  
To the Command II Army Corps*

After the magnificent tests given by the units of this Army Corps in recent days it is of paramount importance to be able to rearrange the units under the natural guidance of their command of the Army Corps.

To this end, and considering also that the units that fight and that will flow in the zone of the current sector of the II Corps of Armament will be in most Germanic, the Command of the II Army Group has come in the determination to entrust the current sector of the II Army Corps with all the troops it contained in the Command of the XXIV Germanic Armored Army Corps.

They will then go to the dependencies of the XXIV Army Corps with immediate effect:

- all the Germanic formations hitherto employed by the II Army Corps and all Italian troops still in line as they do not fight with the 298<sup>th</sup> Division;
- the Fegelein group;
- the *Julia* Division;
- the 387<sup>th</sup> Germanic Infantry Division.

This command must certainly begin the rearrangement of all its elements that are not currently deployed in order to give them as soon as possible the characteristics of fighting units.

Reserve of orders in detail for the use of the reorganized units.

Please contact the XXIV Army Corps Command in Golaja to cede the sector, informing me of the date and time of the transfer.

*Gariboldi*



Document n. 107.

COMMAND 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY  
GENERAL STAFF - OFFICE OPERATIONS

No. 02/23

P.M. 6, 1 January 1943. XXI

*Subject:* Situation in the 8th Army sector.

*To the Heeresgruppe B Command*

(through the German General's office of connection to Command 8<sup>th</sup> Army)

and, for knowledge:

*To the Italian Connection Team at H. Gr. B*

A) With the continuous wear and tear of the XXIV Army Corps and the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, it will arrive with fatal consequences in the moment when the resistance capacity of such large units will be exhausted or at least compromised.

B) The vacuum existing between XXIV Corps and the 19<sup>th</sup> Armored Division is always dangerous and can easily be the way to strong enemy infiltration.

C) When the above happens, the Starobelsk - Woroschilowgrad route leading to the rear of the Fretter - Pico Group opens to the enemy.

I feel obliged to point out these considerations that reflect serenely the deplorable situation but possible because this command has real elements for the provisions of the case being known that I have nothing efficient at my disposal.

The Commanding General General  
*Italo Gariboldi*

Document n. 108.

ARMY GROUP B HIGH COMMAND

Ia n. 5/43 g.Kdos.

2 January 1943

*To the 8th Army Command*

1. - The enemy has so far crossed the Strelzowka - Kantemirowka line to the west only with exploring and security forces. There are no indications that he therefore intends to change its attitude.

The forces of Tschertkowo and the airfield to the north - east of Nikolskoje still hold their own. To the west of these strongpoints is the 19<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div. on the Strelzowka line - Nowo Markowka, further north of the right wing of the Germanic XXIV Armored Corps, holds the settlements west of Golaja.

2. - The 8<sup>th</sup> Army will have to close the gap currently existing between Nowo Markowka and Paszjukow (southwest Golaja) using the 27<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div. which will have to be removed from the front of the XXIV Armored Corps.

To reinforce these divisions, the 617<sup>th</sup> and 619<sup>th</sup> training regiments will be sent to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, arriving in the Starobelsk - Belo Kurakino discharge area.

3. - The use of these training regiments not fully trained and insufficiently equipped must take place with due precautions. Especially the 8<sup>th</sup> Army will have to take care that:

a).....

b).....

c) The regiments of training intermixed with parts of the 27<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div. in combat groups they must be made from the rear in their areas of use.

d).....

4. - With their arrival in the discharge area the training regiments will enter the tactical dependencies of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army for the 27<sup>th</sup> Armored Corps. For normal service and further training they will continue to depend on the 382<sup>nd</sup> training division for the commander of which he has the right of inspection.

.....

High Command Army Group B

Document n. 109.

THE COMMANDER OF XXIX CORPS.

K.Gef.St., December 30, 1942. XXI

*To the Sforza Division*

After I had the honor of having at my command, from November 11, 1942, the *Sforza* Division, it departs from the ranks of the XXIX Army Corps today. For all that during this period the division has accomplished, I express my deep gratitude and my particular praise.

With tireless work, the division built the positions entrusted to them and defended them valiantly.

During the withdrawal in front of the enemy imposed by the circumstances it has performed the assigned tasks of the best of ways.

I turn my reverent thought to the valorous comrades who have sealed their loyalty with their sacrifice. Their sacrifice must not be in vain.

We are bound by the strong will to win and the unshakable faith in the success of allied arms. Faithful in armed camaraderie strengthened by hard times, we will be close side by side, until the final victory is achieved, even if now our paths separate us.

My best wishes and prayers accompany the division.

The General Commander  
*von Obstfelder*

Document n. 110.

II ARMY CORPS COMMAND  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

No. 5000/02 of prot.

P.M. 20, on 22 December 1942. XXI – 11:00 hours

*Subject:* Woroschilowgrad defense

*To the Command of the "Ravenna" Division*

*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Inspiration*

*To General Musinu, Woroschilowgrad Garrison Command*

*To General Rima, Commander Engineers II Corps*

*To Colonel i.g.s. Giglio, Commander Artillery II Corps*

*To the Director Artillery Quartermaster*

*To the Director of Engineers Quartermaster*

*To the Stages Director Quartermaster*

and, for knowledge:

*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command*

It is urgently necessary to defend the two bridges of the Donez, the interposed stretch of the river, the ground on the sides and adjoining, and the center of Woroschilowgrad.

General Musinu takes command of the defense in question. It will have to his dependence for the defense of the bridges:

- on the right Luganskaja (Gariboldi): Colonel Biandrate;
- on the left Wesselaja Gora: Russian Colonel;
- in the center: Colonel Moricca;
- artillery commander: Major Pennella;
- engineer commander: Major Mamoni.

Means required:

- works and connections will be directed by the engineer commander of the II Corps in close contact with the Director of Quartermaster Engineering for means and local knowledge; tools to be provided by the quartermaster;
- work personnel: the one provided by the management of engineers and others already on the spot and what Colonel Moricca will be able to immediately draw from the troops, however, flowed from the front.

*Personnel in garrison positions* (infantry, engineer, etc.): to be drawn as above and armed with the assistance of Quartermaster by the Defense Command.

*Artillery*: the artillery command II Corps. taking the means from that of the town also taking the bty of 75/46 already deployed.

The "Ravenna" Command just arrived, and for now Colonel Moricca and Colonel Manfredi, will compete in the selection of the men and assuming the sorting will also provide to start and arrange in Woroschilowsk the less efficient staff.

Agreements with the German town command for its assistance will be taken by the defense command.

The General of Corps Commander  
*G. Zanghieri*

Document n. 111

COMMAND II ARMY CORPS  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

No. 4977/02 of prot.

P.M. 20, on December 22nd 1942. XXI – 14:00

*To the Defense Commander of Woroschilowgrad*  
and, for knowledge:

*headquarters*

*To the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army*  
*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Quartermaster*

P.M. 6  
P.M. 102

The defense of the two bridges on the Donez and of the adjoining intermediate ground must, for superior needs of great importance at this time, be done to the bitter end and immediately, so as to ensure that no infiltration of enemy means can come until after it has been sacrificed on the spot the last vehicle and the last man. Everyone must know it and you will dispose of the most suitable means, even extreme ones, so that the consignment is skimpy in depth.

Men and means must flow without discontinuity from this moment, both day and night, until the full efficiency of the defense is reached. And then continue again.

Of all this you will answer me to the end.

Receipt.

The General of C.A. Commander  
*G. Zanghieri*

Document n. 112.

ENCODED TELETYPE

December 23, 1942. XXI – 16:35

*From 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command  
To II Army Corps Command*

Prot. N. 02/7393 *stop* Confirm verbal orders to north - east Woroschilowgrad will have to be formed bridgehead to protect passage on the Donez by Belowodsk - Woroschilowgrad road as well as Kondraschowka railway station against enemy *stop* It is actions of decisive importance for future development actions that two predicted points for no reason fall enemy hands *stop* Prepare then with means available to organization at bridgehead defense *stop* Immediately signal weapons tools and anti-tank mines as well as how much have in mind to do this command for organization of bridgehead *stop*  
*Gariboldi*

Document n. 113.

ENCODED TELETYPE

December 23, 1942. XXI – 18:40

*From 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command  
To Command II Corps  
Command alpine Corps  
Command XXXV Corps  
Quartermaster*

Prot. N. 02/7373 *stop* There are symptoms that infiltrated enemy groups find themselves hindered in their action from difficulty of supply *stop* It is therefore necessary that the fight be conducted by the elements both deployed or in the area of enemy infiltration in offensive form hitting the opponent's supplies and especially those of the advanced enemy groups in depth interrupting and closing the supply routes *stop* Daring thrusts of well-armed patrols must have the task of stopping the infantry that follows the avant-garde enemy motorized *stop* In consequence all the habitants they must be defended and kept in particular by blocking all communications with a north - south trend in the most unexpected points, employing where possible against tanks and land mines. The bridges behind infiltrated enemy troops must be blown up. Only with this conduct of operations it will be possible to prevent the enemy with German reinforcements the arrival of the enlargement of the breach and create the premise for the offensive resumption of operations *stop* Orders in this sense will have to be immediately imparted to all the dependent units up to the smallest group or autonomous strongpoint *stop*  
*Gariboldi*

COMMAND II ARMY CORPS  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

No. 4996/02 of prot.

P.M. 20, on December 24, 1942. XXI

*Subject:* Woroschilowgrad bridgehead defense.

*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command  
General Staff. Operations Office.*

Military Mail 6

The forces guarding the bridgeheads of Luganskaja and Wesselaja Gora at 24:00 today are listed in Annex 1.

All units formations are armed with a rifle or smg; is in progress, in relation to the material available at the quartermaster, their partial armament with machine guns, rifles mortar., etc...

In the current day tomorrow 25:

- to the bridgehead of Luganskaja the CC.NN. co. formation will be withdrawn to complete the rearrangement (force: officers 3 - troops 111) and instead will move the command of the 38<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt., the III/38<sup>th</sup> Inf. of formation, a co. mortars from 81, one co. arms acc. and from 47/32 formation of the same regiment (total strength of officers 41, troops 1,114);

- to the bridgehead of Wesselaja Gora will move the Bn. of formation of the 37<sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt. and various minor unitd of the same Regt. (force 24 officers and 540 troops) and two co. railway workers (force 4 officers and 200 troops).

For artillery, the data are shown in annex 2.

The defense of the Woroschilowgrad town (commander, General Blasio) is now charged with a Bn. formation taken from a mounted artillery group, of the strength of about 600 men.

Day by day all the defenses will be increased with the units formations that will gradually come to be.

It deals with:

- for the infantry of units that if they have a certain numerical consistency, they miss most of the unit weapons and that therefore they can not have the efficiency of the normal unit, also because they are still quite shaken;

- for the artillery of isolated pieces without connections that can not do, for now, that direct pointing and without projectiles a.p. etc. from 75.

Overall, a set not yet suitable for a firm defense, especially if the enemy action was also supported by tanks.

No provision can be made, for now, on the reorganization of the units because the armament that can be obtained must be spent to complete the units already put in defense of the bridgehead.

In any case, all the available will be collected and everything possible to cope with the task entrusted to me.

The General of C.A. Commander  
*G. Zanghieri*

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Page 705

Annex n. 1 to sheet 4996/02

Unit	Force	
	Officers	Troops
<i>Luganskaia Bridge</i>		
I Bn. Bridging Eng	8	320
IX Bn. Bridging Eng	8	320
II Bn. of the 38th Inf. Regt.	24	704
company formation of the 37 <sup>th</sup> Inf. Regt.	7	215
company formation of the <i>Celere</i> Division	9	180
company formation of the " <i>Cosseria</i> " division	6	193
company formation of various units	7	189
company formation CC.NN.	3	111
Command platoon of 217 <sup>th</sup> Bn. T.M.	7	35
Platoon machine guns of Corps	2	43
Artillery troops	6	200
Total	87	1370

Unit	Force	
	Officers	Troops
<i>Wesselaja Gara Bridge</i>		
25 <sup>th</sup> co. railway workers	4	200
Battalion formation of the 37 <sup>th</sup>	14	580
Battalion formation of CC.NN	10	400
company formation of Bersaglieri	3	80
N. 2 tanks L/6	1	10
Artillery troops	5	100
Total	37	1,370

Annex n. 2 to sheet 4996/02

Pieces of	Luganskaja	Wesselaj Gora
20/35	8	2
47/32	4	4
75/18	1 + 2 (1)	-
75/27	2	2
75/46	2	2
100/17	- + 3 (2)	-
105 German	1	-

Notes:

(1) The 25/XII.

(2) Of which 2 of 25/XII and I probably ready for 25/XII.

Document n. 115.

COMMAND II ARMY CORPS  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

*Secret.*

No. 5053/02 of prot.  
XXI

P.M. 20, on December 27, 1942.

*Subject:* Defense of the Donez

*To the Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army*

Military Mail 6

I inform you that this morning, Gen. Fretter Pico told me that the Italian troops on the bridges will be replaced and that they will have to take on the front on the Donez between the mouth of the Derkul and Michailovka (mouth Boslokaja Kamenska).

I pointed out that with the scarce available troops (only a reinforced reconstituted regiment of the "Ravenna") on the front of over 50 km was not defensible and that lacking means of work the problem became more difficult.

He has specified the task in the establishment of a security line, however, suitable to block the passage to the tanks and the patrols in their wake, integrated by exploration beyond the Donez.

Having also heard Gen. Dupont on the consistency of his troops, I would say that the task is excessively burdensome and hardly assolvibile.

I have arranged for immediate reconnaissance by the Gen. Dupont and the Cmdr of Engineers of the Corps to have more complete element especially for the possibility of access by enemy tanks.

Everything possible will be done to put the regiment formations in the best efficiency.

Also this achieved the assigned front is always disproportionate to the available force (about 3,000 men and 20 cannons on 50 km with an average linear density of the man every 18 m and the cannon every 2.5 km).

I am perfectly convinced of the need to employ efficient Italian troops at this time, but I do not deny that due to the above circumstances, even a modest enemy attack would certainly be able to account for our defense with the consequences that need not be mentioned.

Since Gen. Fretter Pico told me that the front was established by the superior authorities, I ask, for the good name of the Italian troops, that it be reduced in proportion to the forces themselves, which for the current conditions I think should be fairly limited and in any case not more than 2÷3 km per battalion, provided the Bn. themselves receive reinforcement of weapons against tanks.

It would also have been established that, being a single regiment, it would be a sector or group directly dependent on the army group section Fretter Pico, and that an Italian liaison officer would be seconded to him for orders to the Italian troops.



Reserve to communicate the commander of the Italian group. It is my personal opinion that:

- the currently available troops are not suitable for armament and others to make *counter-tank defense*;

- assign to 3 Bn with some pieces of 47 or 65 or 75 or 105 50 km *counter-tank defense* is wanting to make sure to be a *disastrous figure* to the Italian troops.

I await communications of this command before giving executive orders that are urgent.

The General of C.A. Commander  
G. Zanghieri

Document n. 116.

ARMY GROUP B HIGH COMMAND

*Confidential!*

Ia n. 4695/42 g.Kdos.

December 27, 1942 – 20:00

*To 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command*

PROVISION N. 1

FOR THE CONDUCT OF COMBAT BETWEEN THE DONEZ AND DON

1. - Army Group B has the task of covering the north flank and rear of the Don Army Group with offensive actions.  
To this end, it is first of all necessary to attempt to reconquer the general line respectively: Kalitwa sector to the north - west Tazinskaja - Millerowo - railway line Millerowo - Kantemirowka - Don.
2. - Army Group B therefore intends to:
  - a) to attack and annihilate with the forces advancing over the Donzkoj - Belowodsk line the enemy group (XVII Arm. Corps) found in the area west of Millerowo and around Woloschino to free the north flank of the Fretter Group. This attack must be carried out as soon as possible;
  - b) to attack later - with possibly concentrated forces - the enemy forces (especially the XVIII Arm. Corps) found around and south of Millerowo and precisely west of the river Kalitwa, driving them over this river to the east. This attack will have to lighten the northern front of the Don Army Group.In favor of the formation of a strong center of gravity in the area of Millerowo, we will have to assume the great risk to the detriment of the vacuum of Kantemirowka.

3. - *First tasks:*

- a) the *Fretter - Pico Group* will have to advance the 304<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. in a north - east direction so that it can later attack together with the Kreising group and the 19<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div. the enemy in the south - east and east of Millerowo, releasing it over the Kalitwa River. It will be attempted to continue the harassment of enemy supplies in the Kalitwa valley which must be cut as soon as possible. Through reconnaissance it will have to be taken and maintained contact with the west wing of the Don Army Group (Hollidt Group) advancing from Skassyrskaja to the Beresowka Millerowo estuary will have to be held at all costs The reinforcements of the Kreising group arriving via Kondraschowka will have to be assembled promptly under a single command in Donzkoj area and then employed - in close cooperation with the 19<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div. Reinforced rising from Belowodsk (see Figure 3. b) - for the attack on the enemy group west of Millerowo. Millerowo will have to - as far as possible - collaborate in this action by betting in a north-west direction. The 19<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div. will start the attack for the conquest of the Kamischnaja valley, predictably on December 29<sup>th</sup>.

A further advance in this point is scheduled for December 31st.

The Donez must be insured in the Kamensk sector (including, in contact with the security zone of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Romanian Army - H.Q. Schachty) - Aidar estuary. The defense must be organized with centers of gravity at Kamensk, Kondraschowka and Wesselaja Gora. Bridges should be placed on bridgeheads with sufficient depth and defense in all directions;

- b) the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army will have to - at any cost, maintain the Tschertkowo strongpoint and Aviation Grounds at south Kantemirowka - as soon as possible, together with the 19<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div., start the attack from the Belowodsk area with the target to annihilate - therefore in cooperation with the Kreising group (see Figure 3a) - the enemy forces in the area west of Millerowo.

Afterwards - according to the development of the situation at Tschertkowo - it will be the task of the 19<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div. reinforced, in the bosom of Gr. Fretter Pico, to the Kalitwa river west of Djogtewo and to beat the enemy forces to the northeast of Millerowo The garrison of the cornerstone Tschertkowo will - if possible - take in good time contact with the northern wing of the 19<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div. reinforced by continuous and repeated forced reconnaissance to the south.

All the forces that can be made free in the sector of the 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army will have to be immediately employed to strengthen the 19<sup>th</sup> Arm. Div. the north flank of the 19<sup>th</sup> Arm. div. and the void between Belowodsk and Michailcwka must be ensured with the employment a minimum of forces - possibly mobile - to be taken from the XXIV Arm. Corps, until the intervention of the 26<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. on arrival (around 15 January 1943) will be possible.

4. - *Variations in dependencies.*

With immediate effect the XXIX Corps passes to the Army Gr. Don.

The 298<sup>th</sup> infantry division passes immediately to the dependencies of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command. It will remain in Tschertkowo where it will be reorganized. orders follow in this regard.

5. - The 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division will therefore have to be reunited in the Starobelsk - Nowo Pskow area available to the Army Group B.

6. - *Combat conduct.*

Fighting in the break-in front over the past few days has shown again that the enemy actions are successful when it can en masse with armored units or when it can march with the infantry through the existing gaps, circumvent and encircle the weak German securities and attack them from behind. On the other hand, the enemy infantry could resist nowhere to the attack of the German infantry even if this was carried out with very weak combat nuclei. First of all, it is a matter of always and everywhere attacking in all directions, adopting an agile combat conduct, having A/T weapons everywhere available and to try always and everywhere and with all the means available to cut off supplies (fuel) for the motorized units of the enemy.

Attention is again drawn to the order of the High Command Army Group B n. 4686/42 g.Kdos.

7. - The Fretter - Pico Group and the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command will immediately report their intentions on the basis of this provision.

Frhr. v. Weichs

Attached to f. Ia n. 4695/42 g.Kdos.

ARMY GROUP B HIGH COMMAND

Ia n. 4800/42 g.Kdos.

December 29, 1942 - 10:50 hours

*To the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command*

In addition to the provision n. 1 on December 27, 1942 I order:

1. - Of decisive importance for the further combat operations of the *Army Group Don* is that it can keep its left wing in the Skassyrskaja area - Beresowka estuary. It must be prevented at all costs that the enemy manages to break into the welding point between the two Army Groups in the Kalitwa valley.
2. - The Army Group B has the task of closing the front towards the Army Group Don. It is responsible for contacting the Hollidt Group.
3. - The *Fretter - Pico Group* will therefore have to immediately shift its forces towards the Kalitwa sector and create a secure contact with the Hollidt Group.

All other tactical measures in the Army sector must be subordinated to this task.

4. - The 8<sup>th</sup> Italian Army will have to use the strengthened 19<sup>th</sup> Armored Division in the south-east (north wing - about Michailowo Alexandrowskij) so that it can as soon as possible and in direct collaboration with the Lancken Group attack and combat the enemies elements west of Millerowo. To this end, the extreme risk must be assumed for the Tschertkowo - Kantemirowka area.

Frhr. v. *Weichs*

Document n. 117.

#### HIGH COMMAND ARMY GROUP B

Ia n. 223/43 g.Kdos.Chef/

17 January 1943 – 23:15

.....

#### ORDER OF THE HIGH COMMAND ARMY GROUP B

a) 8<sup>th</sup> *Italian Army*:

.....

The XXIV Arm. Corps (including the *Julia* Div.) will have to head on Rovenki engaging in the fight with the enemy to beat the opposing forces there in cooperation with the 320<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div.. The mass of Alpine Corps will have to cover the rear of the XXIV Arm. Corps.

The Alpine Corps - but only when the disengagement from the Don will be approved by the Fuhrer - must be done to the XXIV Arm. Corps staggered in the rear to the right, in the area east of Waluiki.

Frhr. V. *Weichs*

Document n. 118.

#### PHONOGRAM

No. 02/300.

January 16, 1943 – 17:30

*From 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command  
To the Alpine Army Command*

Leaving the Don line without a specific order from the Army is absolutely forbidden *stop*. I am personally responsible for the execution *stop*

*Gariboldi*

Note: Between 7:00 am and 7:45 am, telephoned this order by telephone to the three Commanders of the Division *Stop Martinat*

Document n. 119.

PHONOGRAM

17 January 1943 – 12:30

*From the Army Corps Command*

*To the Commands Divisions Tridentina, Vicenza, Cuneense*

- No. 365. Telephone communication followed today between hours 11:00 and 11:30 confirm:
1. - As a result, Hungarian large units have to retreat, even the Alpine Army Corps must start tonight at the well-known movement.
  2. - Subsequent lines:
    - a) Rossos railway - Ostrogozsk;
    - b) Olchovatka valley;
    - c) upper Ajdar valley - Ivjany valley - Alexejevka.
  3. - Limited movement sectors:
    - to Tridentina:* to the north: from the limits with Hungarian large units; South: Bassovka - Seyejevka - cement factory Podgornoje - Postojalyi - Charkovka - Kavalen;
    - to Vicenza:* to the south: Dukovoje - Arkangelskoje - Popovka - Sabolotovka - Krasnoje;
    - to Cuneense:* to the south: Lotscina - Put Lenina - Olichovatka - Charkovskoja - Nicholajevka.
  4. - Each large unit maintains close contact with adjoining large units.
  5. - Movement must be protected by rearguards.
  6. - Keep as much food and ammunition as possible.
  7. - What can not follow is destroyed.
  8. - Radio appointment every three hours starting from 18:00 today. Mandatory listening in stops.

General *Nasci*

ALPINE ARMY CORPS COMMAND  
OPERATIONS OFFICE

No. 501/Op. of prot.

P.M. 108, on 18 January 1943 – 10:00

Reference map 1: 300,000

*To all the dependent Commands  
To the Germanic Connection Unit at the C.A. TO.*

ORDER OF OPERATIONS N. 2

To confirm verbal dispositions given in today's meeting I have:

1. - First phase, 19 January:
  - a) XXIV Armored Corps to block at Natschalo K. Lenina the origins from Rossosc to Podgornoje and Saprina;
  - b) Julia Division the group from the current positions pushes on the north - west spur of Rossosc in order to block the Rossosc - Karpenkovo roadway, facing west and south;
  - c) Cuneense Serri Division behind Julia in the second row;
  - d) Vicenza Division pushes on Samojlenkov;
  - e) Trentina Division pushes on Postojalyi.
2. - Second phase, 20 January:
  - a) Division Julia regains movement to occupy the north - east spur of Olchovatka in order to block the origins from the south and the roadway of Olchovatka - Postojalyi and that of the valley Olchovatka;
  - b) Cuneense Division shows off on its right with goal Kilschenkov (Kulescirovka) Olchovatka valley;
  - c) Trentine Division pushes on Karaitscnik & Charkovskaja (N. Charkovka);
  - d) Vicenza Division follows the Trentine movement, of which it is a rear guard;
  - e) XXIV Armored Corps followed the movement of the Julia, of which it is a rear guard.
3. - Third phase, 21 January:

Plan to reach the Luzenkovo - Sceljakino line.

From today, the Alpine Corps will have to consider operating as in the high mountain area. Let all the trucks be abandoned and rely only on sledges and baggage carts, loading on them the maximum possible of food and ammunition. All efforts must be made to bring counter-tank guns of 75/97/38 and ammunition to the following by using the tractors of the 11<sup>th</sup> Regimental Group of the Army Corps.

General of the Army Corps  
Commander  
*G. Nasci*

8<sup>th</sup> ARMY COMMAND  
GENERAL STAFF - OFFICE OPERATIONS

No. 02/7391 of prot.

P.M. 6, on December 23, 1942. XXI

*Subject:* Reorganization.

*To the II Army Corps Command*  
*To the "Cosseria" Division Command*  
and, for knowledge:  
*To the Alpine Army Corps*  
*To the 8th Army Quartermaster*

It is due of honor to provide as soon as possible the reorganization of the units and individuals coming from the battlefield.

1. – The *Zones of collection* are two:

Woroschilowgrad; Rossosch,

Agreements as directional orientation. They will be in the details specified by the responsible commands keeping in mind necessity that units be detached from other troops and commands for supply.

2. - *Reorganization of commands.*

For the Woroschilowgrad mass: the II Army Corps Command. For the mass of Rossosch: the "Cosseria" division Command.

3. - *Tasks.*

Keeping in mind the aim, to be reached as soon as possible, progressively requires:

- a) provide accommodation, meals, health services;
- b) ascertain numerical consistency divided by weapon, body and service and keep it in mind following the fluctuations;
- c) to evict the handicapped;
- d) organizing and framing the units keeping in mind opportunities to maintain the previous organic constraints as much as possible;
- e) to arm and equip the units asking for what is necessary from the quartermaster that will give as much as possible;
- f) to make constant moral work accompanied by *a rigid disciplinary* recovery to be obtained by every means. Take care in this very form. Special care and attention to cadres especially officers.

Overall it is a difficult task that requires maximum *energy and activity*, by the commanders and officers employed. The result deserves the fatigue.

Communicate (on the part II Corps and "Cosseria" div. )daily the strength (existence - increases - decreases) and the project of the organization.

General of the Army Commander  
*I. Gariboldi*

Document n. 122.

COMMAND OF THE 8<sup>th</sup> ARMY  
GENERAL STAFF

No. 019/135 of prot.

P.M. 6, on December 26, 1942. XXI

*Subject:* Reorganization of units.

*To the II Army Corps Command*  
and, for knowledge:  
*To the Army Engineers Command*  
*To the Army Quartermaster*

P.M. 20

I state that the defense of the bridges on the Donez is the main task entrusted to the command of the II Corps that must dedicate every availability of men (sufficiently efficient morally and physically) and materials.

It is however necessary that at the same time the reorganization of the units continues, which should be completed in the shortest time.

Therefore, in relation to the moral and physical efficiency of the troops, the availability and quality of the cadres, the armament and the individual and unit equipment currently available for the units being reorganized and available at the quartermaster, please examine the possibility of constituting:

a) infantry and artillery units that can be used on-line and must now be used to defend bridges. The armament available at the quartermaster will be distributed to them;

b) infantry and artillery units (battalions of about 500 men) with less efficient personnel and to be employed in a rear area and for defense against paratroopers and partisans. For these units the means of transport would be reduced to the minimum necessary for their life and the kitchen materials replaced by materials of circumstance using also the kitchens of the existing homes in the locality where the units will be located. Individual armament and available few automatic weapons;

c) engineering units that can be used as such or to be used in road maintenance work. For the units of the army engineers will provide the dependent command of the engineers;

d) unit of services that can be used; men of services that would remain unused.

In order to decongest Woroschilowgrad as soon as possible, all personnel who can not be used for the construction of units to be used in the defense of bridges must be started to the Rikowo - Gorlowka area. The goodwill must be carried out in the highest order and for organized organic units: agreements with the quartermaster for the transport and operation of the services in the aforementioned area.

Colonel Dragoni, bearer of this order to the command of the II Corps, will clarify my thinking better.

The Commanding General General  
I. Gariboldi



Document n. 123.

ENCRYPTED TELETYPE

No. 02/703

8 February 1943

*From the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command*

*To Army Group B Command*

(through the Italian Unit of connection to Army Group B Command)

I came indirectly aware of the order of movement of the Army into the Gomel area. It is absolutely not executable because:

1. - The troops that move by ordinary means, and which I doubt can reach the current area of rearrangement, could not possibly stretch the path of another 200 kilometers. No one would still be valid.
2. - The Army would move from its natural supply and evacuation line, Lviv - Kiev and the quartermaster establishments, with serious prejudice to the reorganization.
3. - The Command of the Army would move from the axis of connections that unites it with Rome and Berlin, whose essential necessity in the complex work that must be addressed.
4. - It is contrary to what I have been asked by my Supreme Command to the German one.

Consequently, given also the distance to which the columns are still tributaries in the area of rearrangement, suspending for now the movements of the part already arrived waiting for a change of decisions that I warmly ask, provoke also in consideration that the troops located to south and with long journeys on foot they should lengthen moving northwards to make room for the Hungarians who have a modest route.

Gariboldi

SUPREME COMMAND

No. 20717/Op.

20 February 1943 – 22:15 hours

*To Superesercito*  
*To 8th Army Command.*  
*To General Marras*

1. - In relation to current 8<sup>th</sup> Army situation this Supreme Command has decided that troops, means available in the rearrangement area only consists of II Corps with two divisions and corresponding share of troops and services and adequate quartermaster.  
The OKW has already took note of the decisions this Supreme Command.
2. - For reconstitution of the aforementioned Army Corps, it must be used as far as possible in a place that is not included in the personal of the Alpine Corps.  
Reserve communications about concession by Germanic artillery, anti-tank and vehicles already requested by this Supreme Command.  
It is excluded in any case sending from Italy of means and materials.
3. – The 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command and XXXV Army Corps and the Alpine, cede what is necessary for the II Army Corp, must return to Italy compatibly with available rail transport.  
They will also have to include exuberant quartermaster elements under new regulations. Order follow to be fixed the Army command in relation to general situation.
4. - Supertrasporti and General Marras interested in competent Germanic bodies aim to obtain for the meantime increase number translated to start repatriation. The organic transport plan required for return will be compiled by Supertrasporti in agreement with the corresponding Germanic bodies on the basis of the data that the 8<sup>th</sup> Army will provide, as soon as possible. Route to be taken into consideration passes through Warsaw - Brest Litowsk - Gomel.

General *Ambrosio*

Document n. 125.

8<sup>th</sup> ARMY COMMAND  
SERVICE OFFICE

No. 016/915 of prot.

P.M. 6, on March 2, 1943. XXI

*Subject:* Use of draft animals, vehicles and materials of units destined to repatriate.

*To the II Army Corps Command  
To the XXXV Army Corps Command  
To the Alpine Army Corps Command  
To the Cavalry Grouping Command  
To the Army Artillery Command  
To the Army Engineers Command  
To the Army CC.RR. Command  
To the 8th Army Quartermaster*

Their offices

The Supreme Command has arranged for the reconstitution of the II Corps, provision is made, as far as possible, with personnel and material already existing in Russia.

Therefore, in addition to the provisions already given with f. 05/377 on 24 February, telegram 016/851, 016/852 and 016/853 of 27 February and telegram 05/405 of the 1<sup>st</sup> March:

1. – *Draft animals, carriages and harnesses.*

The Alpine Corps will return to Italy with just 1,000 mules already chosen, the Cavalry grouping with only national horses.

All the remaining draft animals (national and Russian), all the baggage train (regulatory and Russian), all the sleds and related harnesses and trappings of the Alpine Corps as much as the XXXV Corps, of the Cavalry Regt Group and the artillery and army units will have to be ceded to the II Corps.: the interested commands will signal to the II Corps, and for knowledge to this command, the number of draft animals, wagons, sleds and harnesses that are ceded.

The II Corps provide for the replacement of alpine and cavalry drivers with personnel to be drawn from the unit employees.

Direct agreements between II Corps and interested commands, about the replacement of drivers and the start of the baggage train and draft animals.

2. - *Mobile kitchens, cooking crates and kitchen materials in general.*

They must not be brought to Italy by the units who return, but left in the area available to II Corps.

The commands of Corp, The Cavalry grouping, artillery and army engineers provide to initiate without doubt to the II Corps, under direct agreements, the kitchen material not strictly necessary for the life of the

units until the time of departure; the remainder will be ceded upon departure.

3. - *Unit armament material*

referred to in letter B paragraph 3 of the aforementioned sheet 05/377 (artillery, light machine guns, machine guns, mortars of 45 and 81, weapons against tanks) must be transferred to the II Corps only if it is an efficient material and with related accessories and spare parts.

The non-efficient materials, or in any case not usable, are set aside in collection centers, which will be mentioned in n. 4 following.

4. - *Remaining materials or vehicles supplied or existing at units that return.*

This command does not know which: it will be the precise constitution of the trains destined to transport to Italy the units returning.

It is foreseeable that there will be a type of train suitable, more than anything else, for the transport of personnel, some vehicles and little material. The material that does not have a place on these trains will be sent to Italy with subsequent trains, by the quartermaster.

It is therefore necessary that the commands of Corps (XXXV and Alpine), cavalry grouping and artillery and army engineers establish as of now, one or more localities in their area where they establish collection centers; to which the materials which are not indispensable for the functioning and the life of the units will flow, and subsequently, at the time of departure, the remaining materials.

At the head of each center must be placed active and energetic officers, supported by an adequate number of staff, who will answer the first housing, the escort and delivery, then, the materials in the homeland to the respective units.

The vehicles must flow and remain at the collection centers with the respective drivers.

Regardless of the above, this command is intended to know immediately the consistency of the main materials held by each unit, for possible assignment to the II Corps of those missing at the completion of its equipment.

Therefore the commands of Corps, Cavalry grouping, artillery and Army engineers, each for the units dependent on them, are kindly requested to report with such urgency to this command, and to acquaintance with the quartermaster, in addition to the locations chosen for collection centers, the main materials currently in their possession (cars, trucks, tractors, car repair shops, trailer trucks, special trucks, tow trucks, motorcycles, disinfection stoves, health coffers, hospital tents, Weiss ovens, veterinary bonnets, radio stations, telephone materials, chemical materials, etc.),

At the time, they will communicate to the quartermaster the material that will concentrate at the various collection centers.

The General Chief of the General Staff  
*Bruno Malaguti*

Document n. 126.

ENCRYPTED TELETYPE

April 12, 1943. XXI – 21:30

From the Supreme Command

To General Marras

and, for knowledge:

*To the II Corps Command*

*To the Superesercito*

Prot. 21739 *stop* Following recent conversations with OKW this Supreme Command has carefully examined possibility reconstitution II Corps. & has concluded that better conditions for rapid re-establishment of said unit are offered by the Mother Country *stop* Communicate therefore to OKW the decision this Supreme Command to provide for reorganization II Corps in Italy and make agreements with competent Germanic bodies and with Superesercito for re-entry mode and concession of the necessary transport means *stop*

General *Ambrosio*

## Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

### Maps

# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

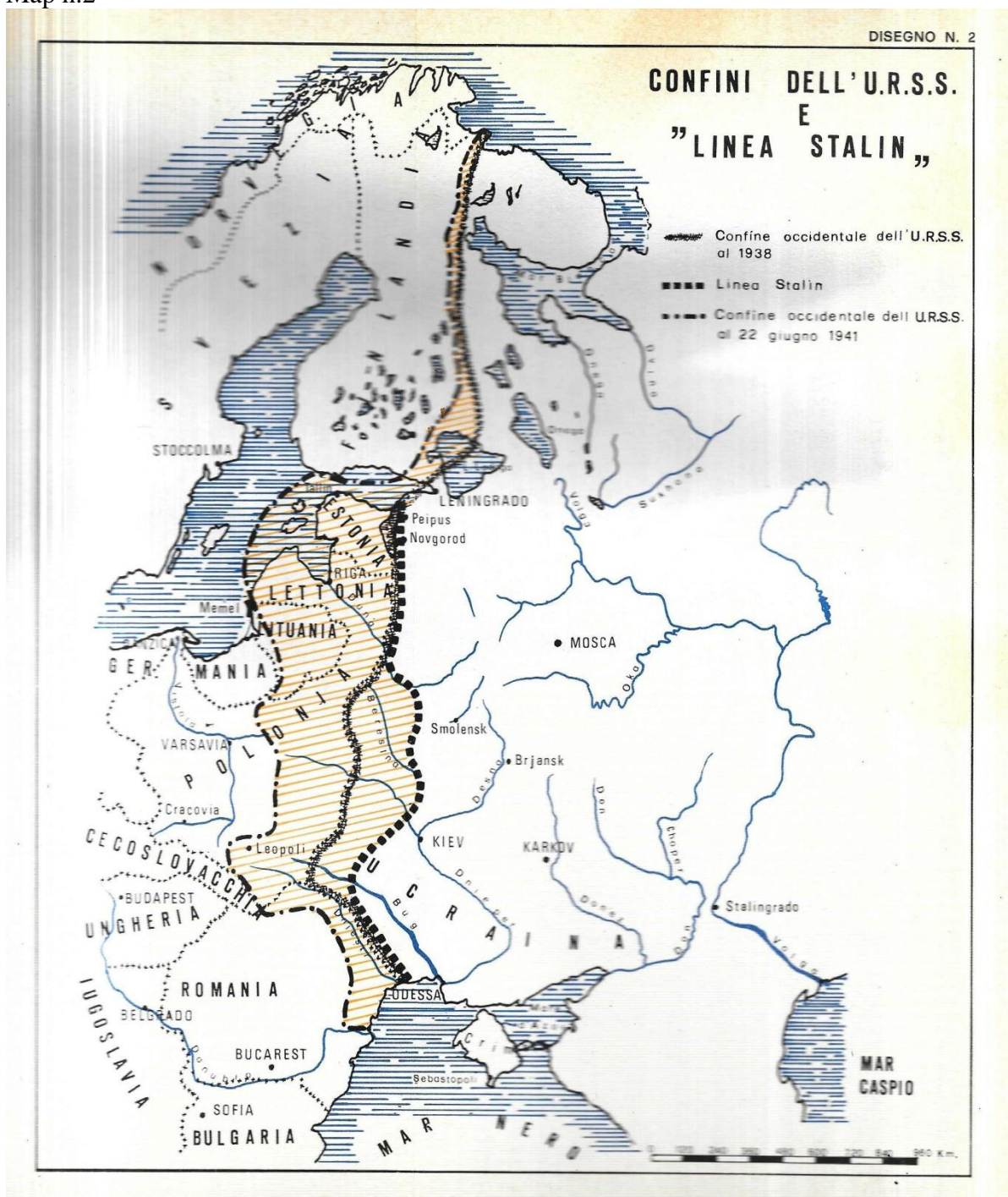
Map n.1





# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

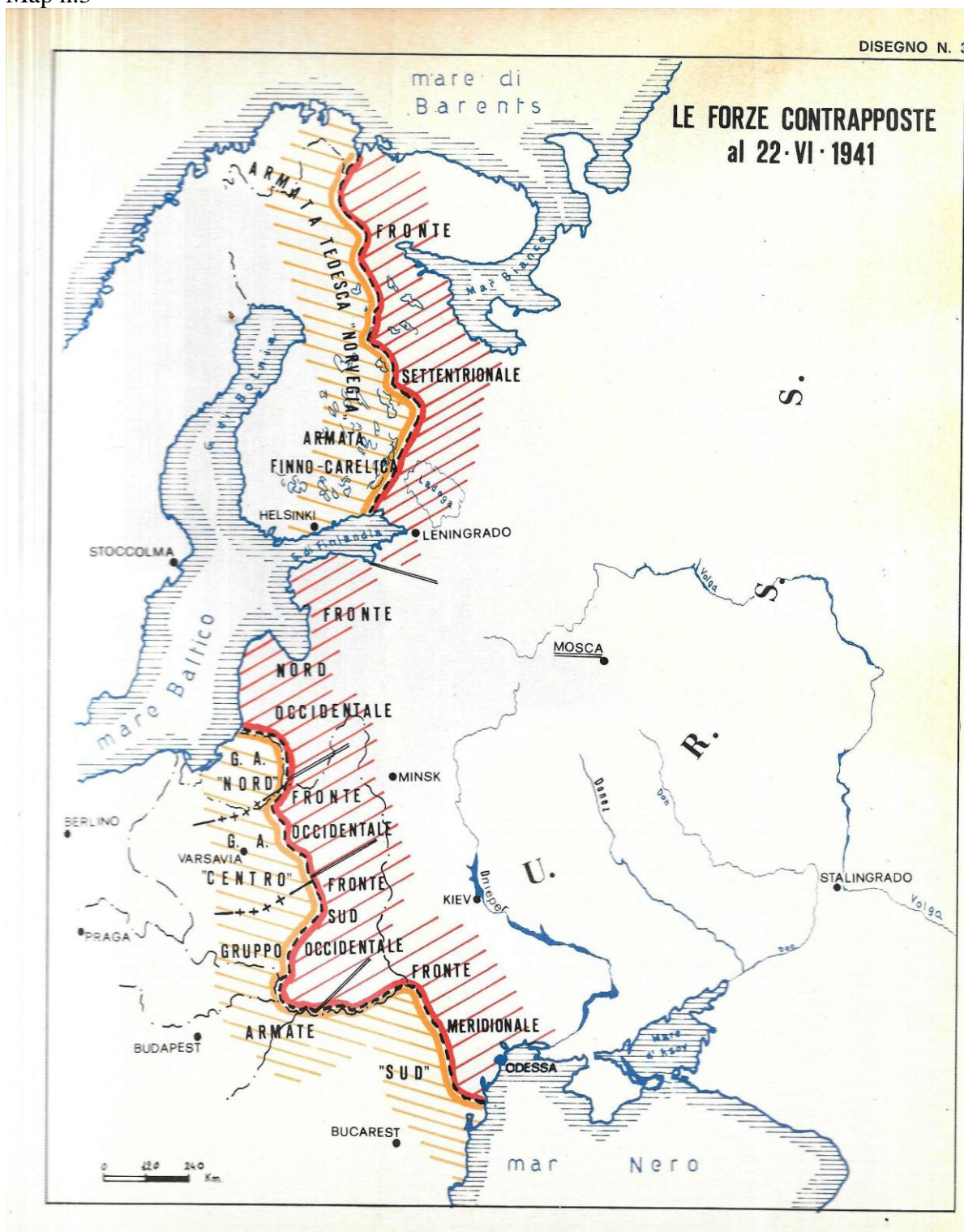
Map n.2





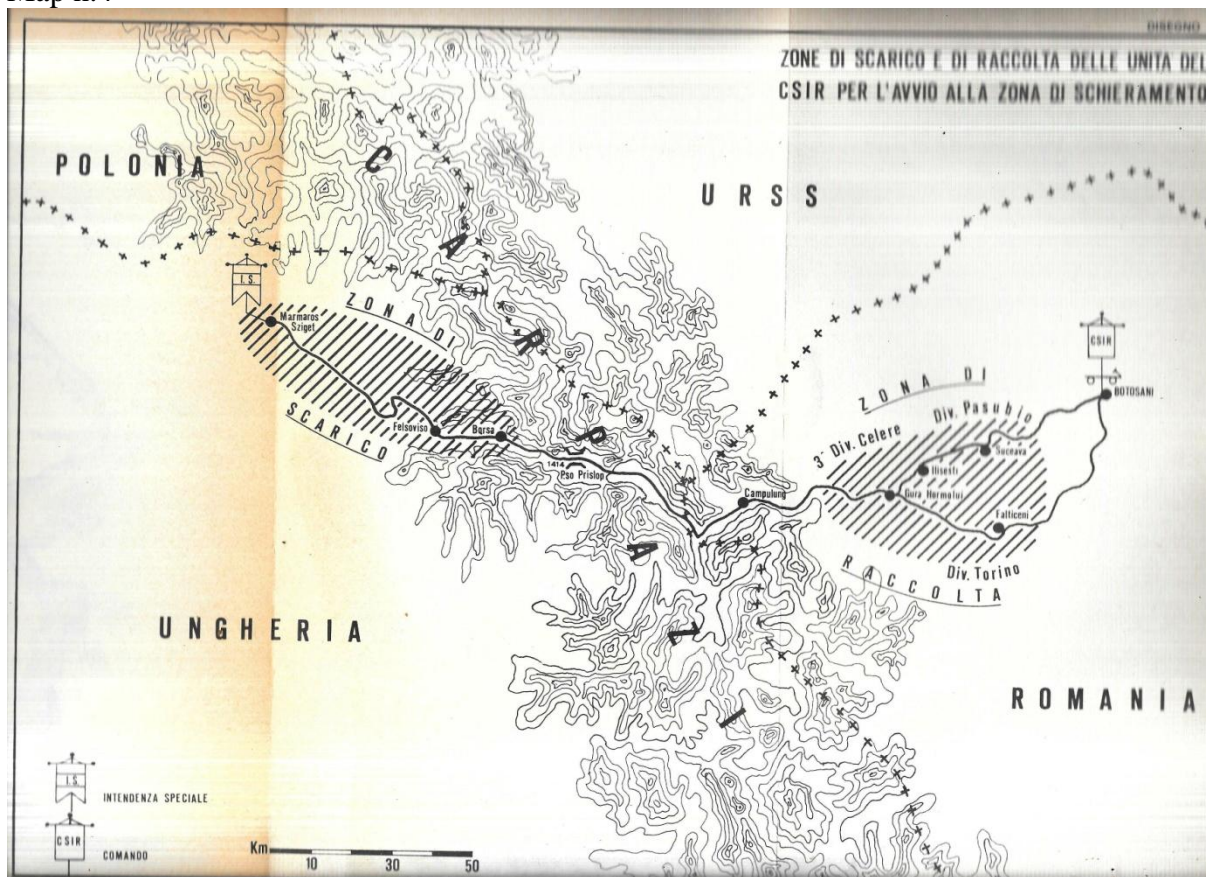
# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.3



## Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

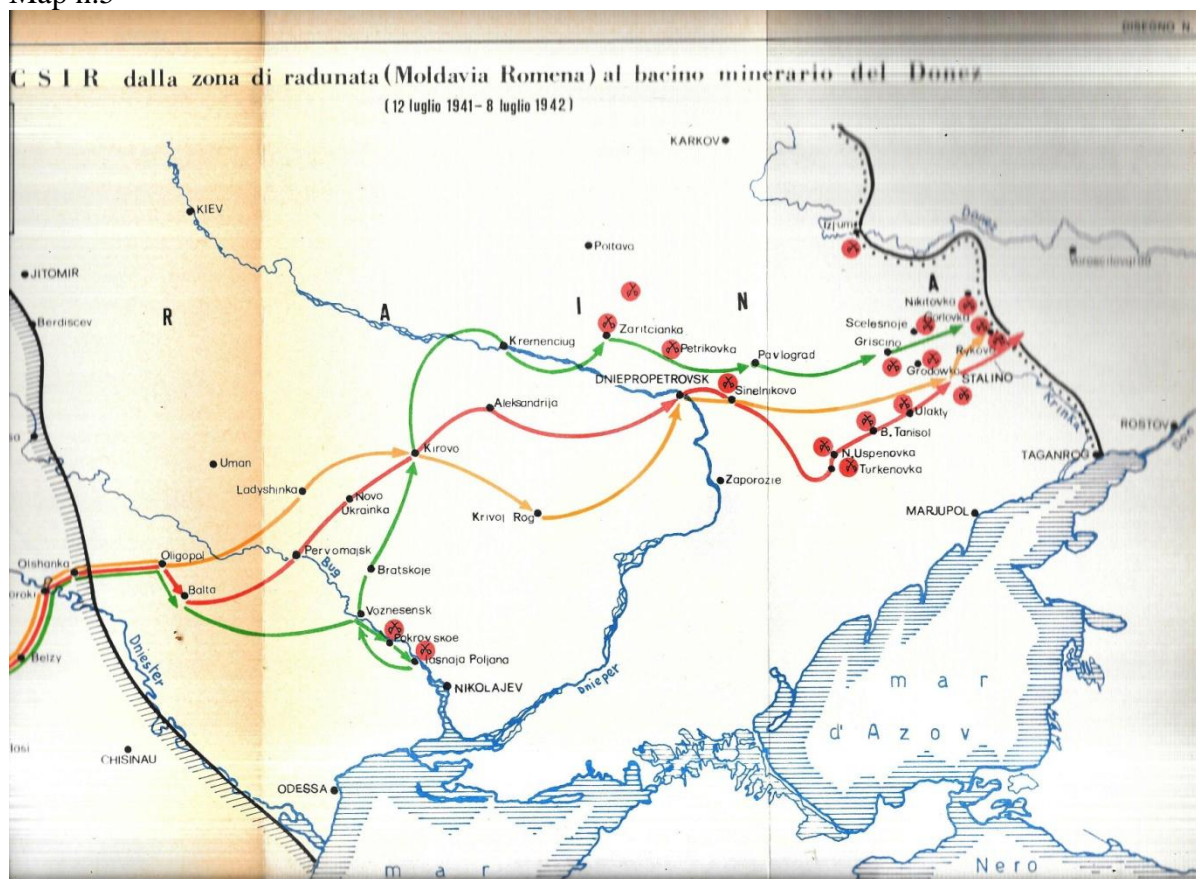
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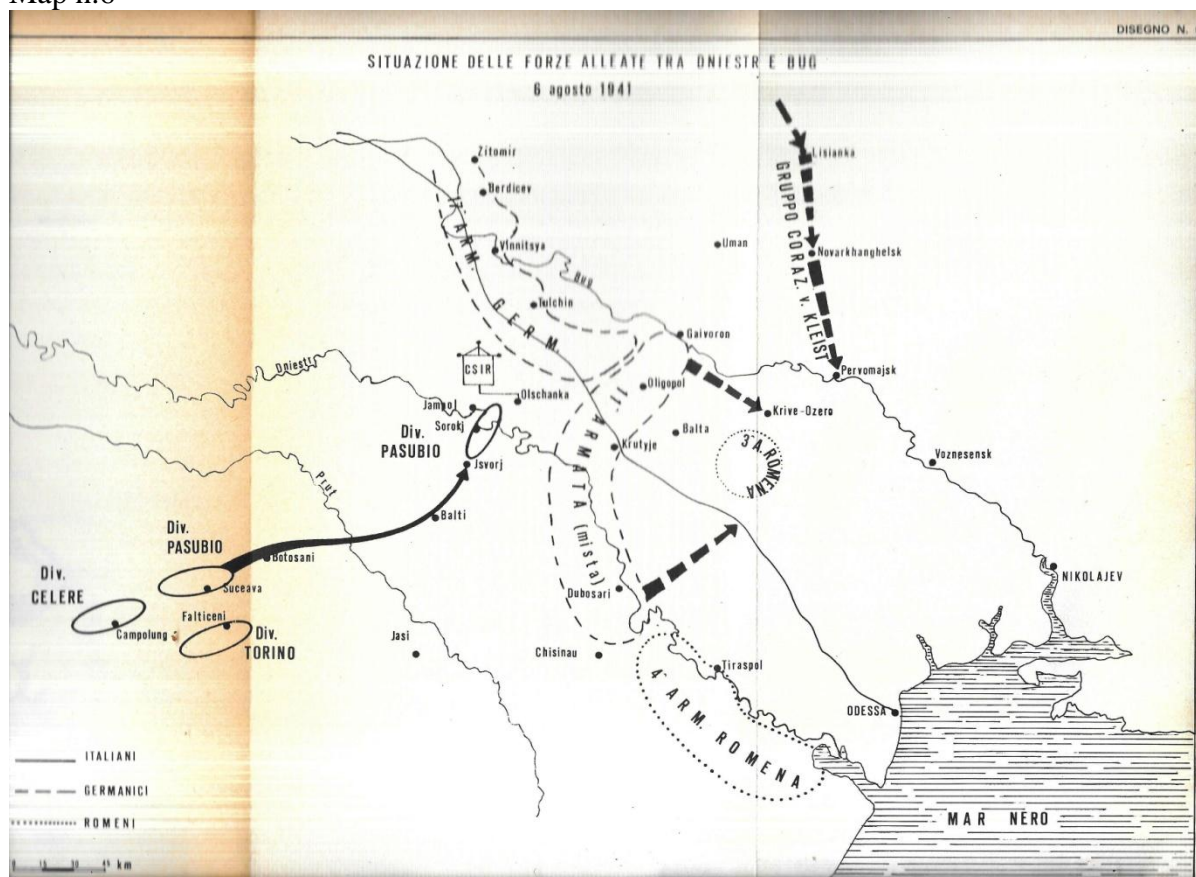
## Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.5



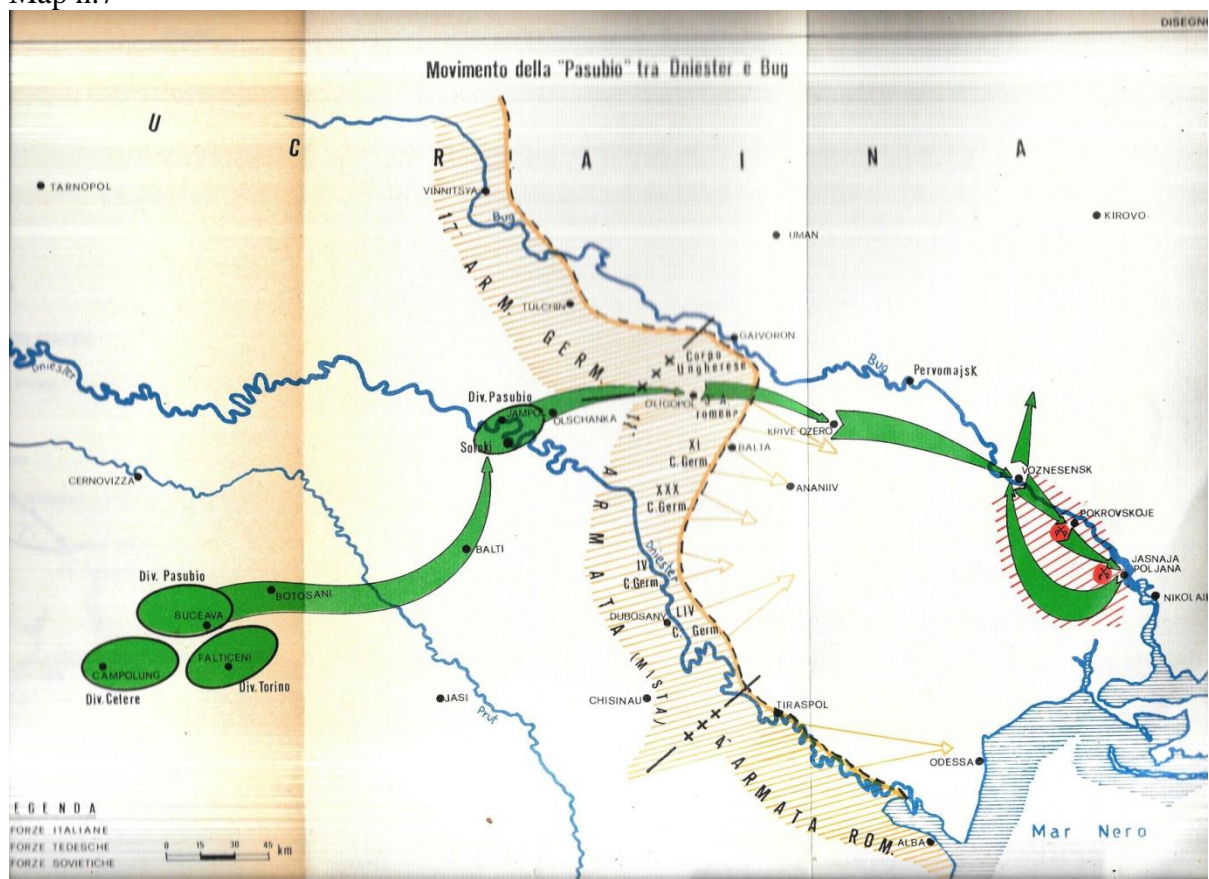
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Map n.6



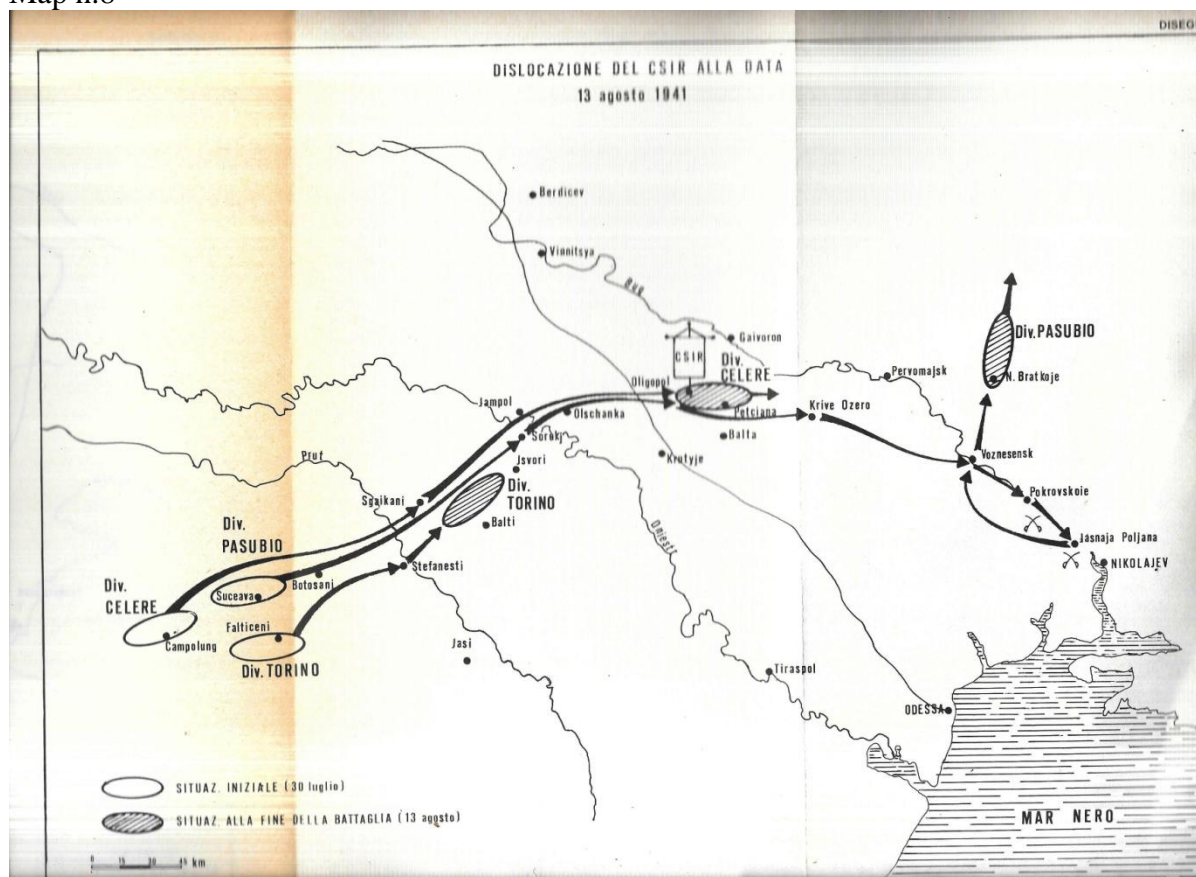
# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.7



# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

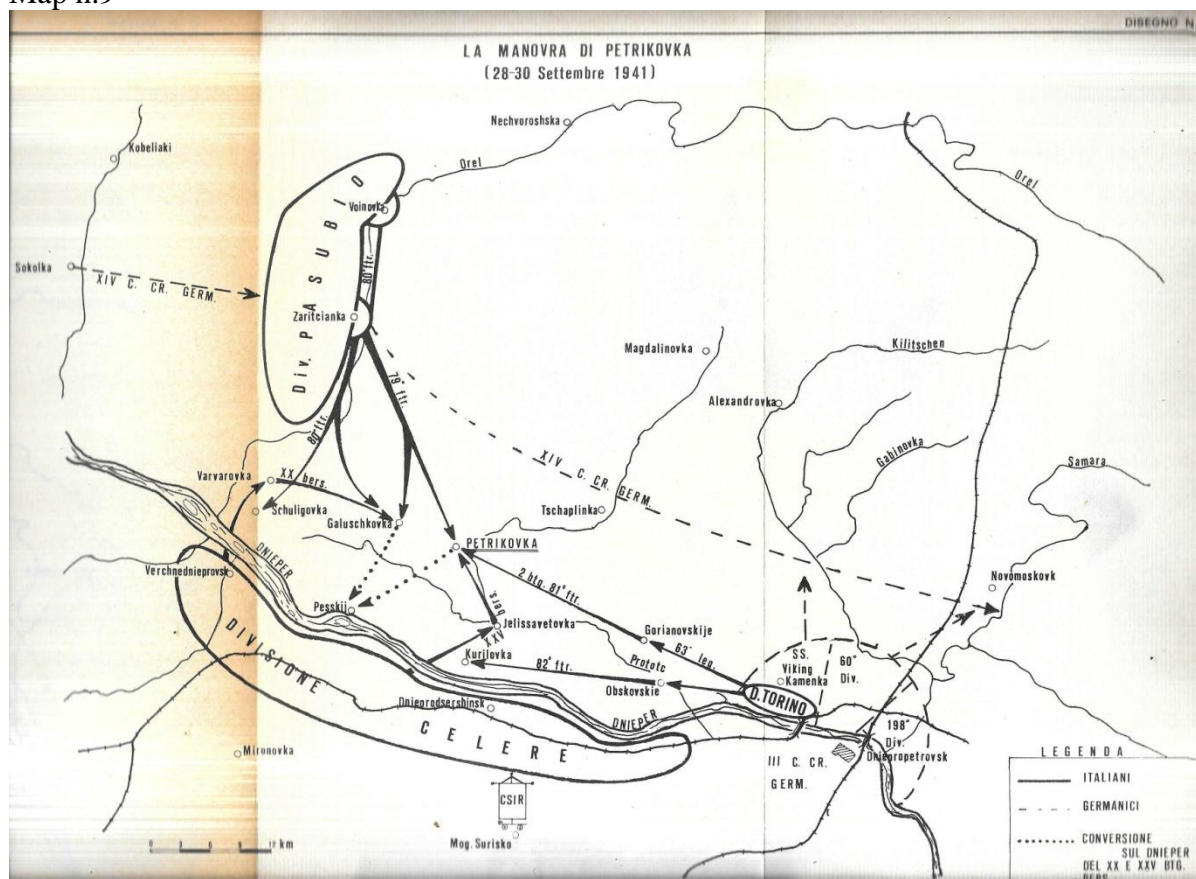
Map n.8



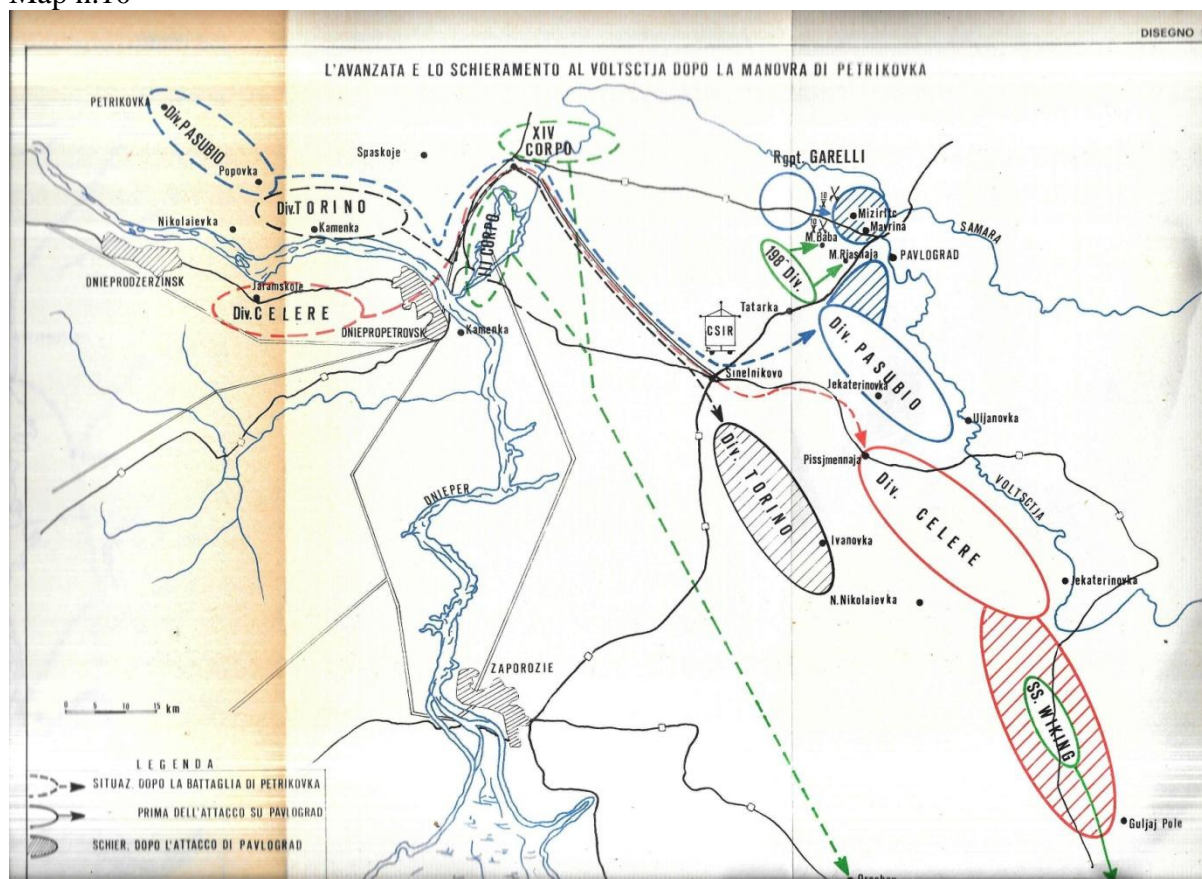


# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.9



### Map n.10



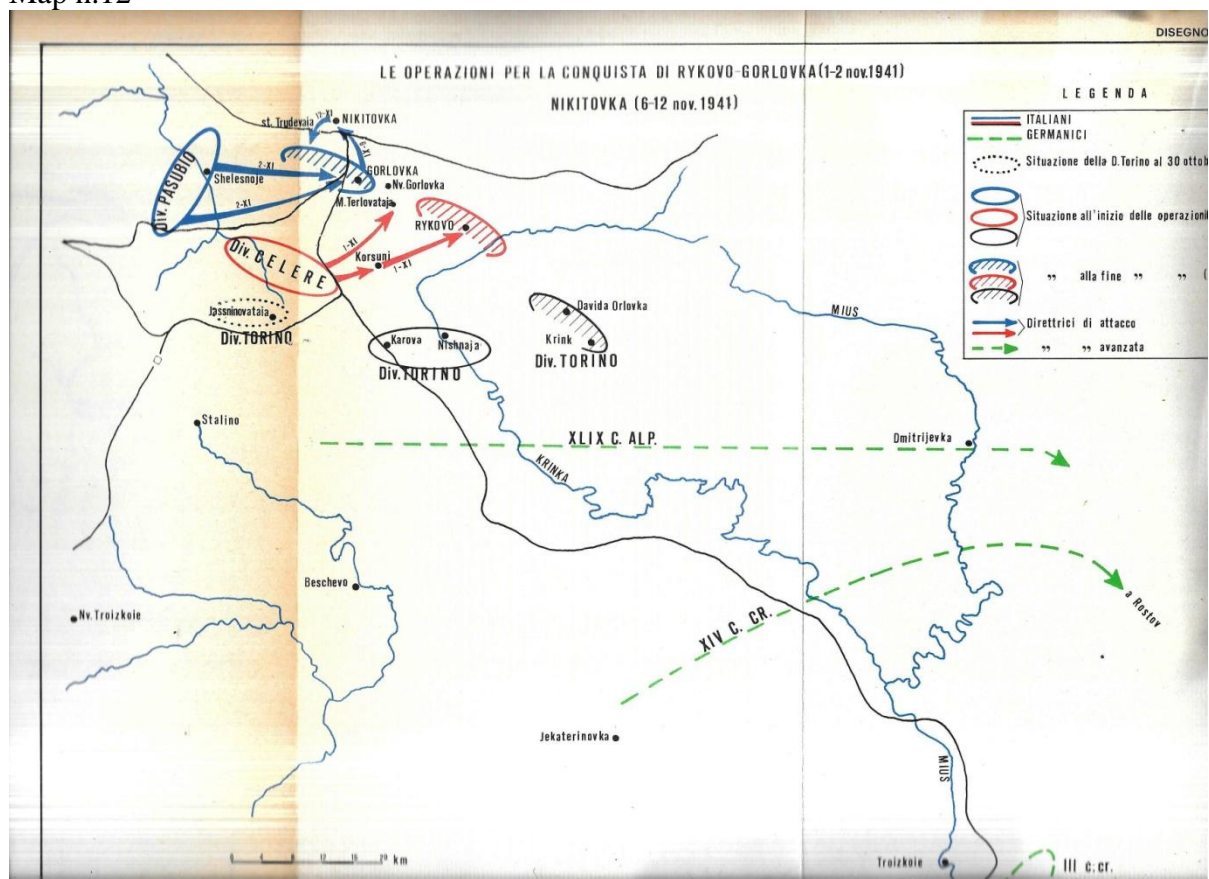


Map n.11



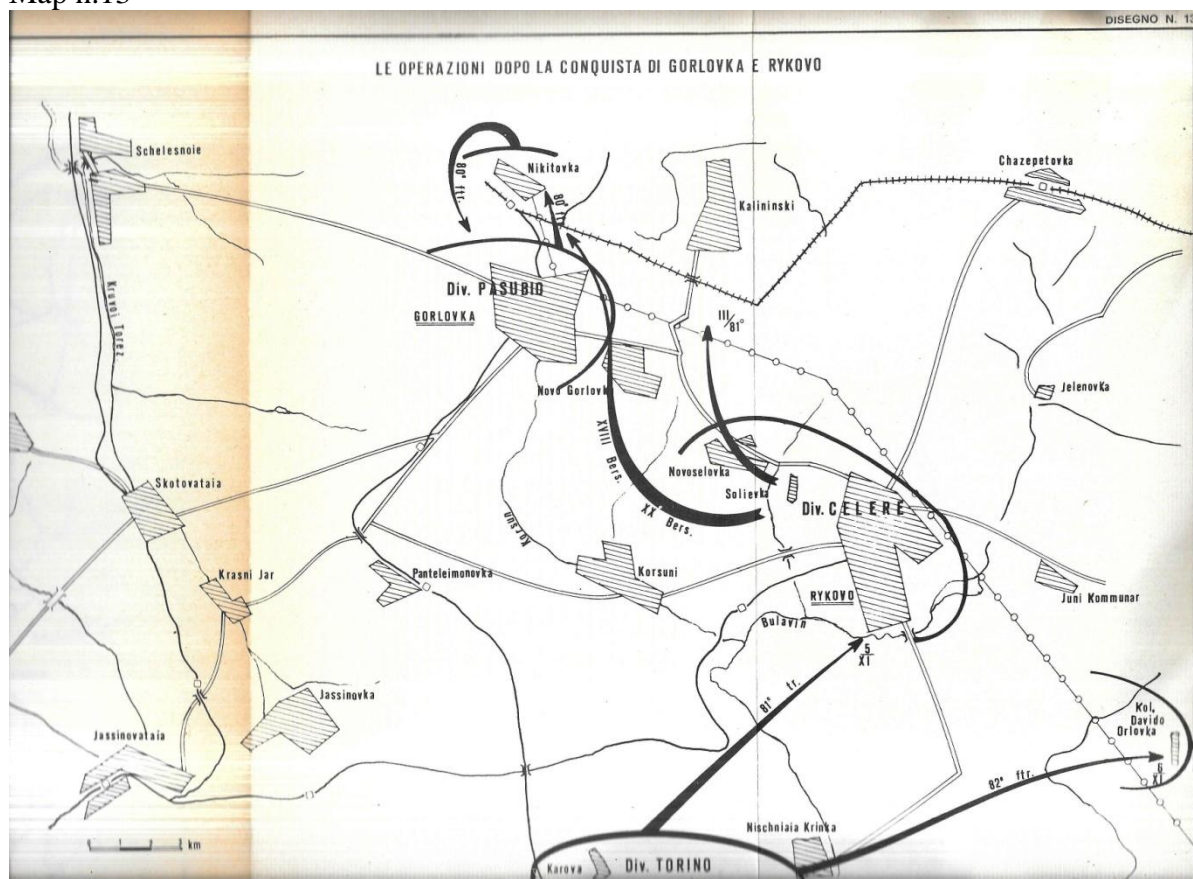
# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.12



# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

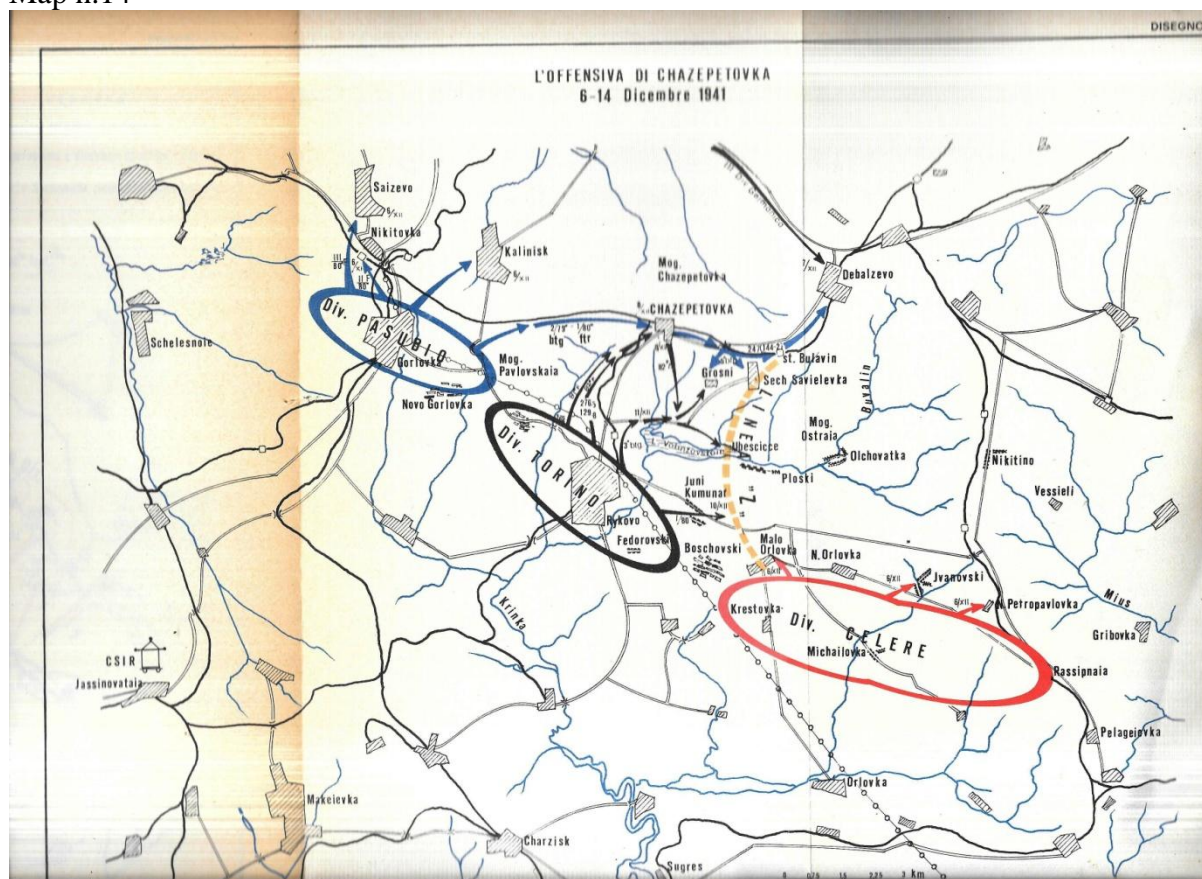
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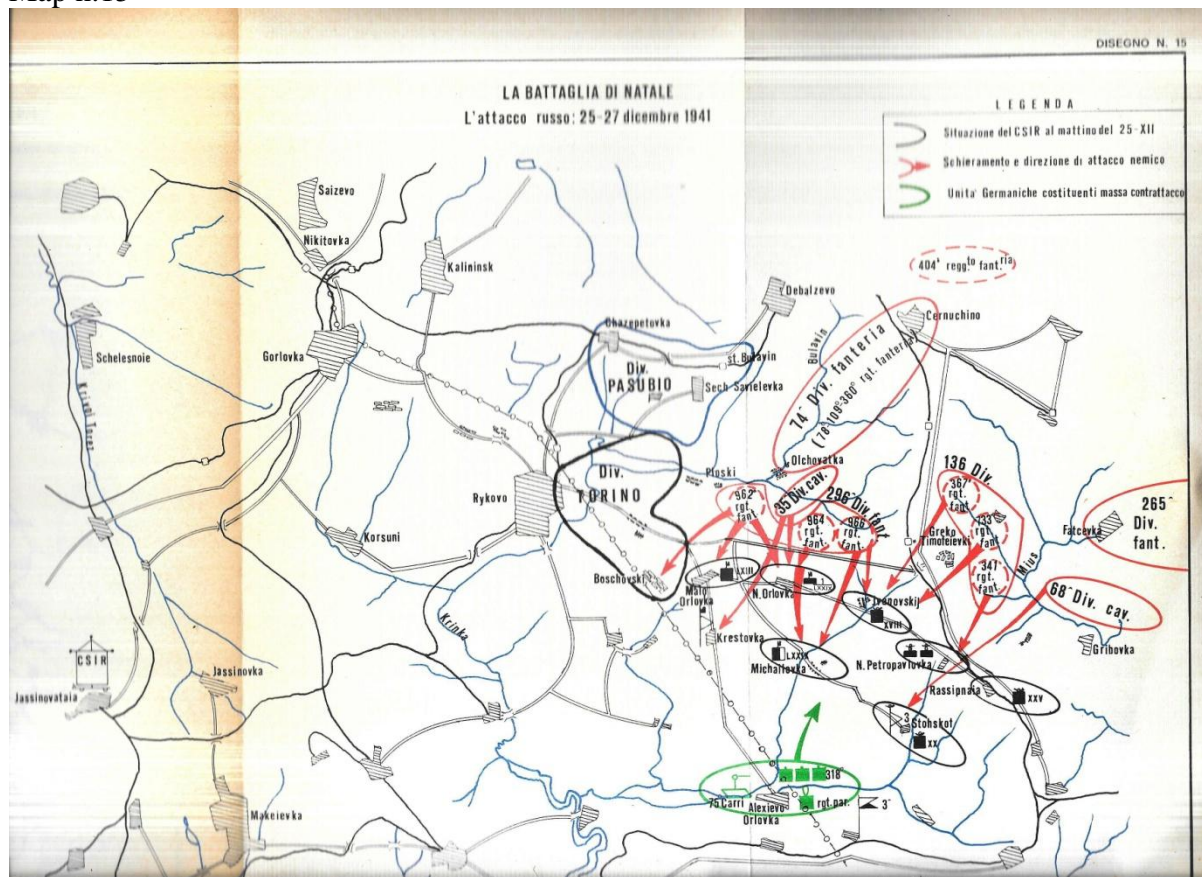


# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.14

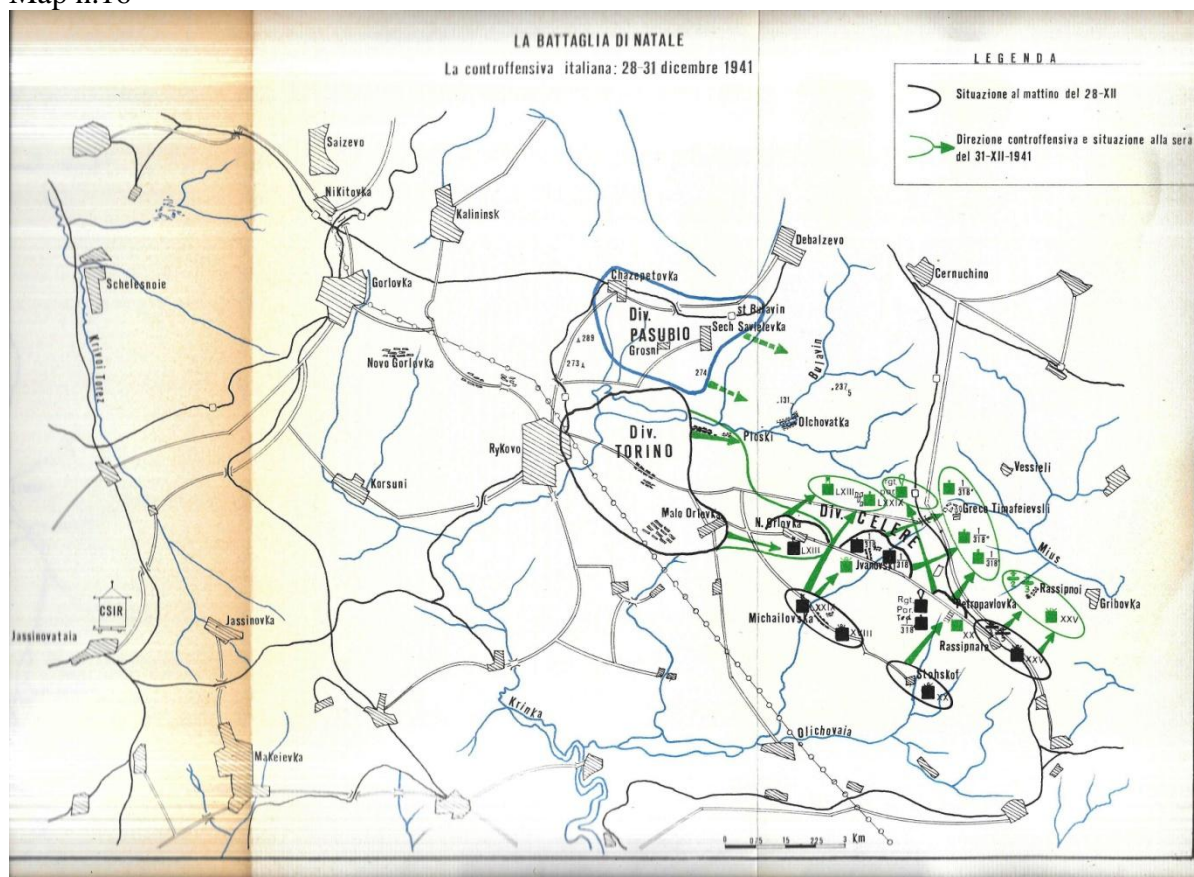


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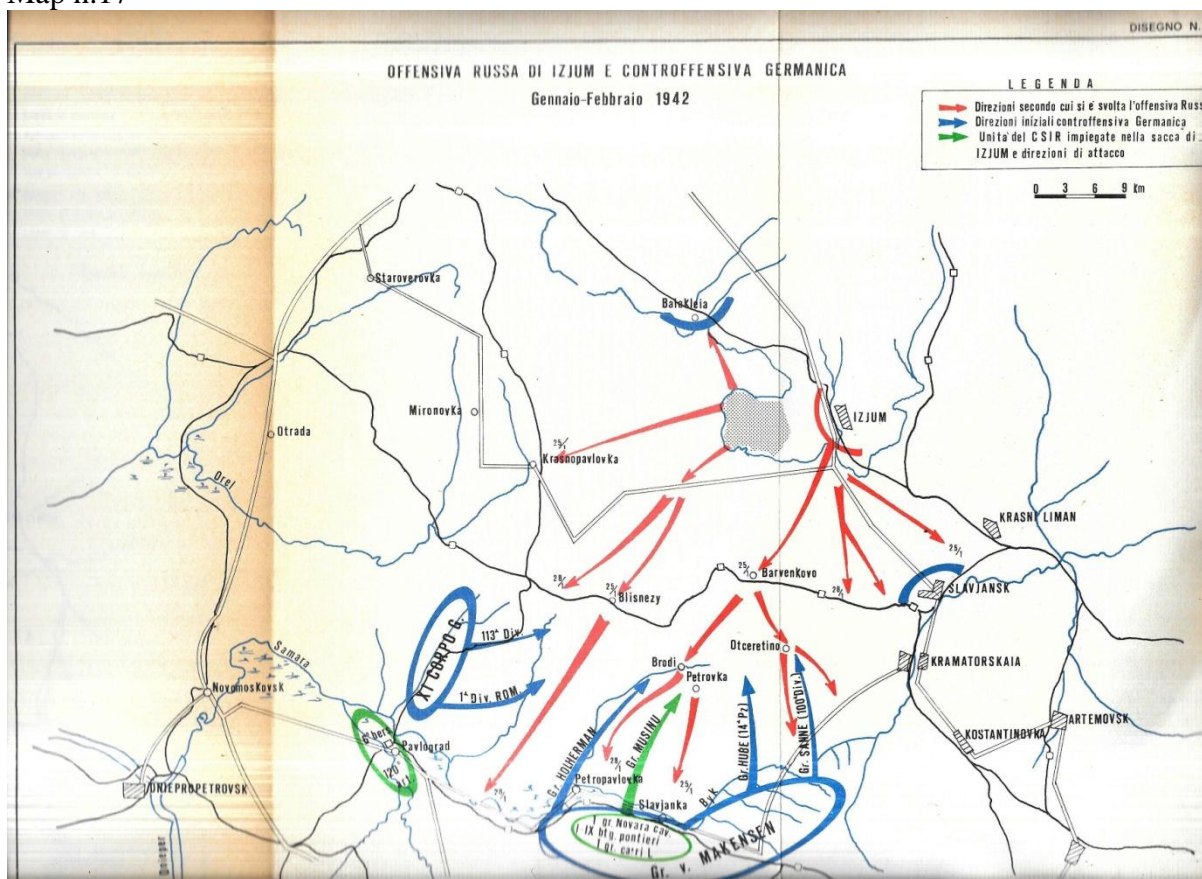
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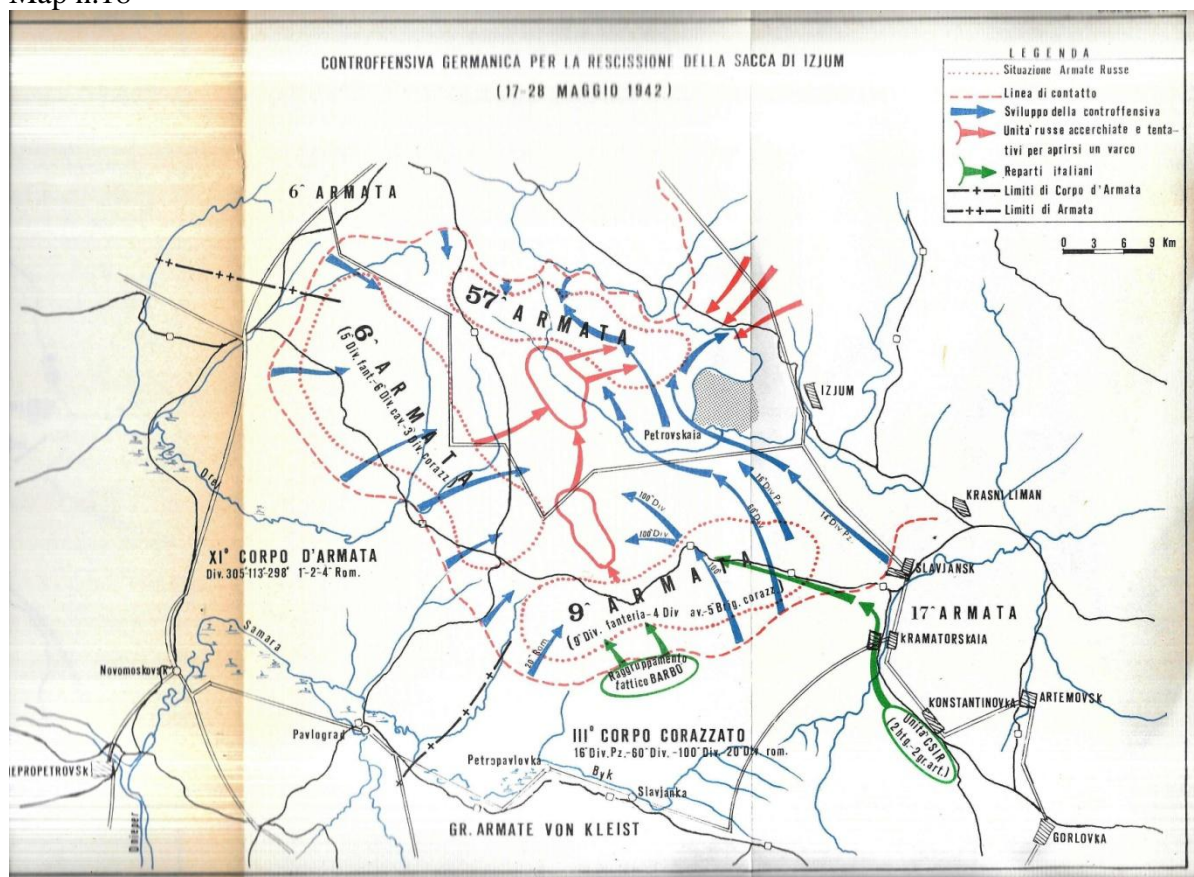
# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.17



# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

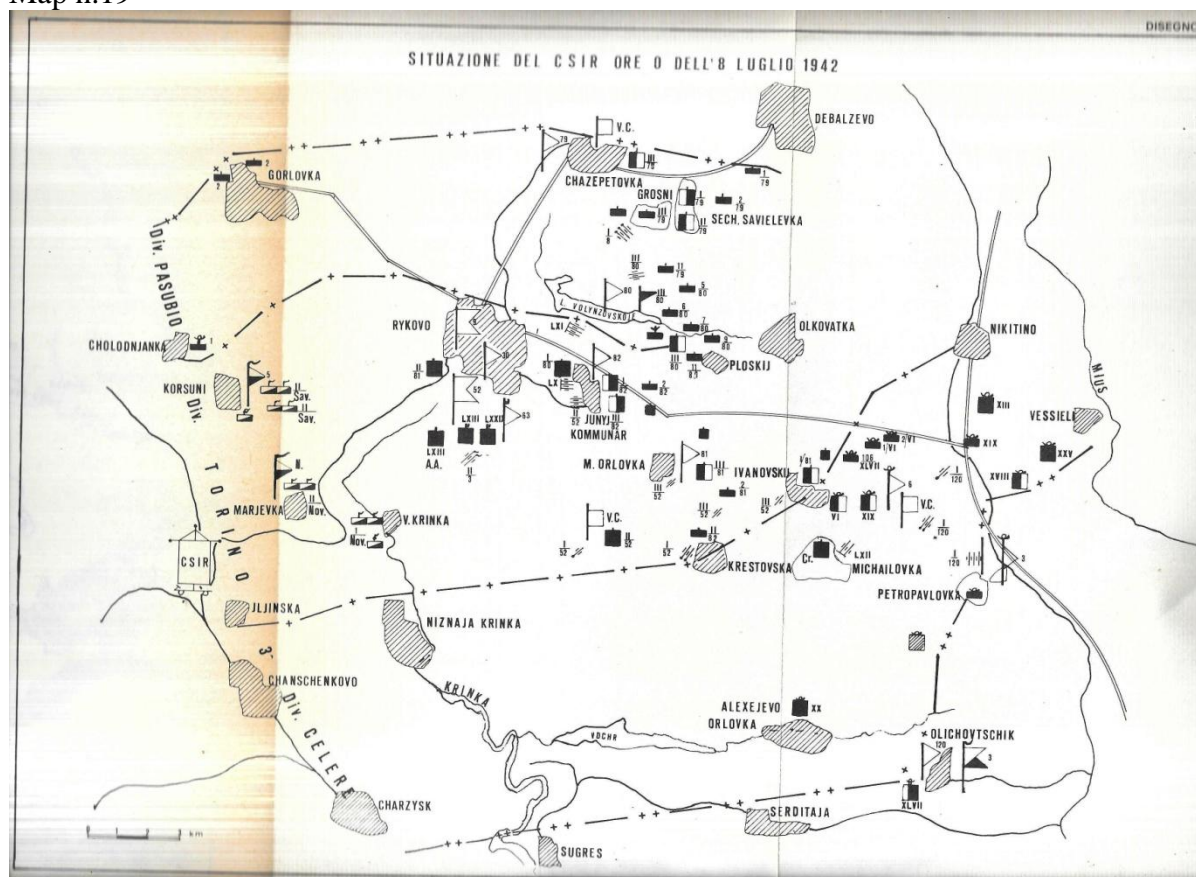
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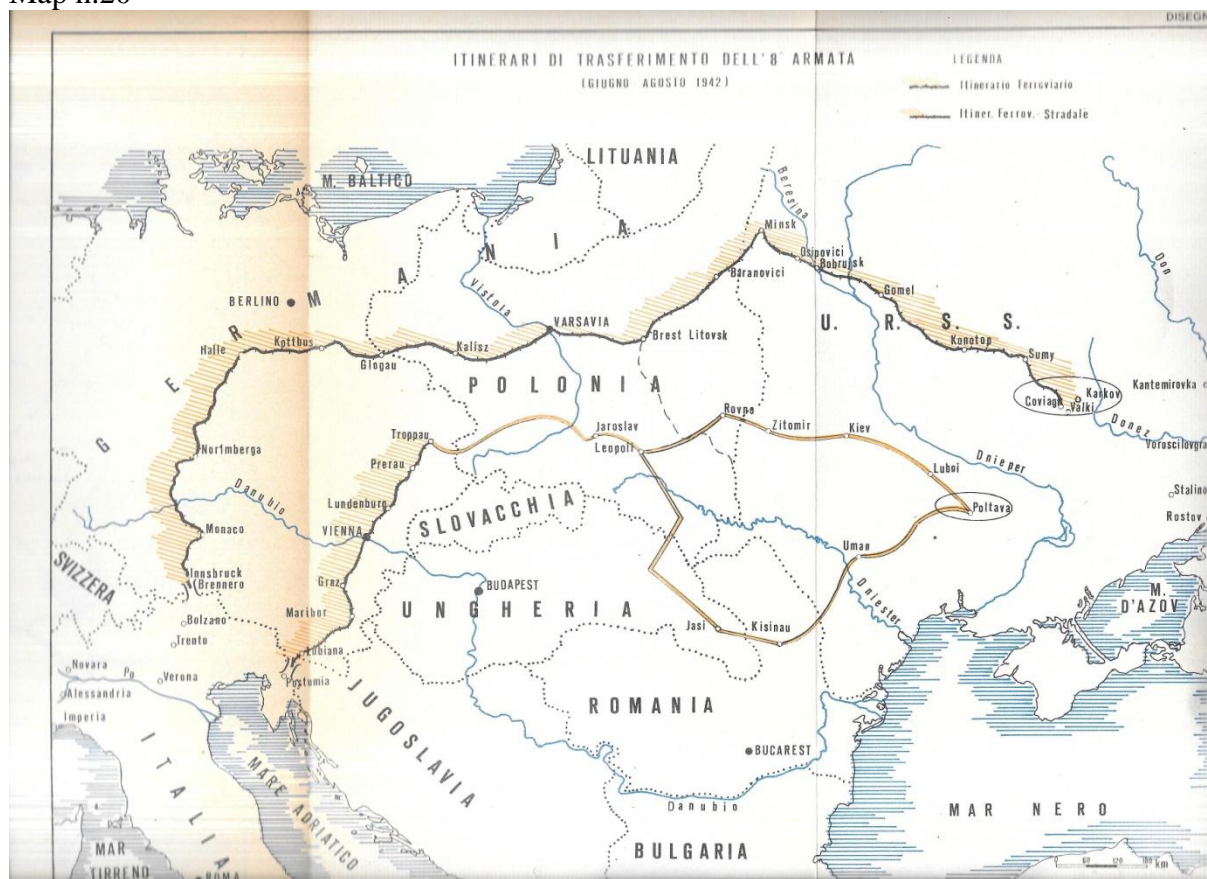


# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

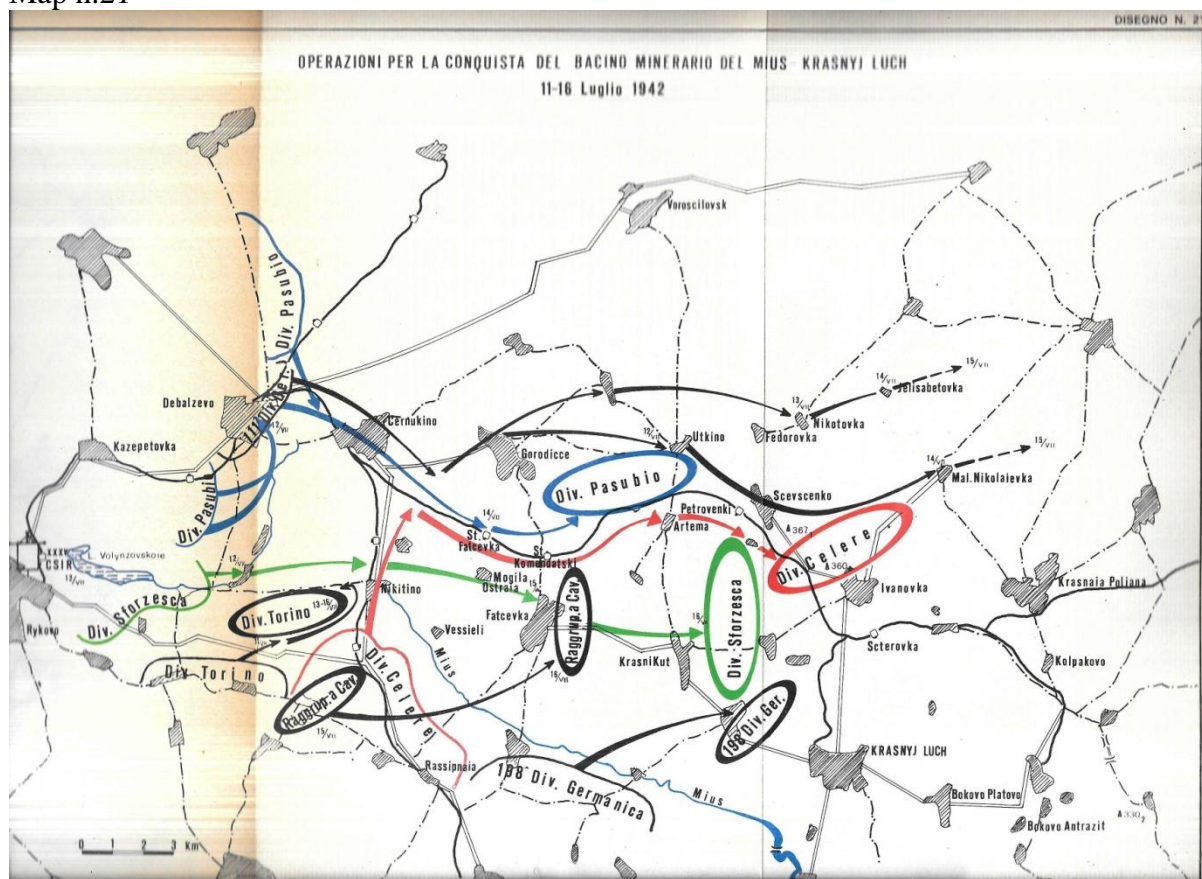
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## Map n.20



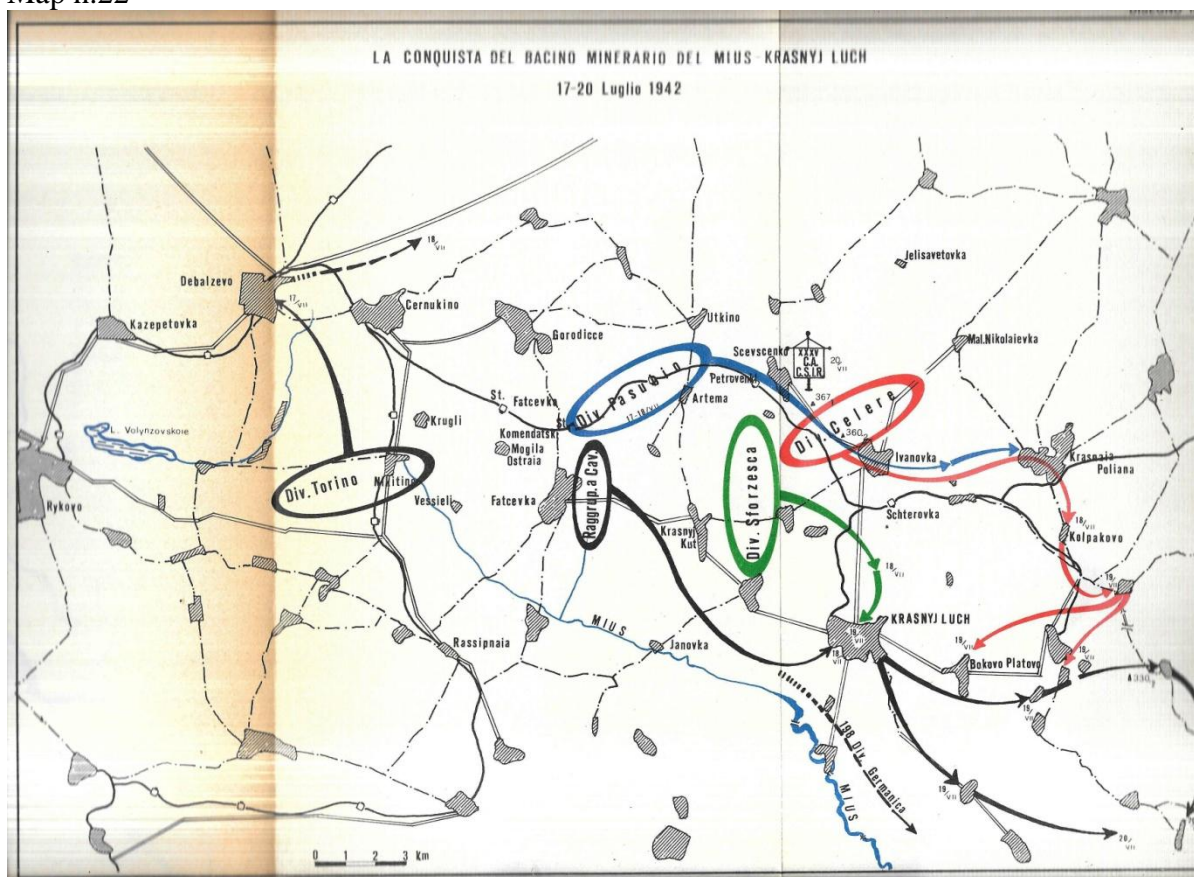
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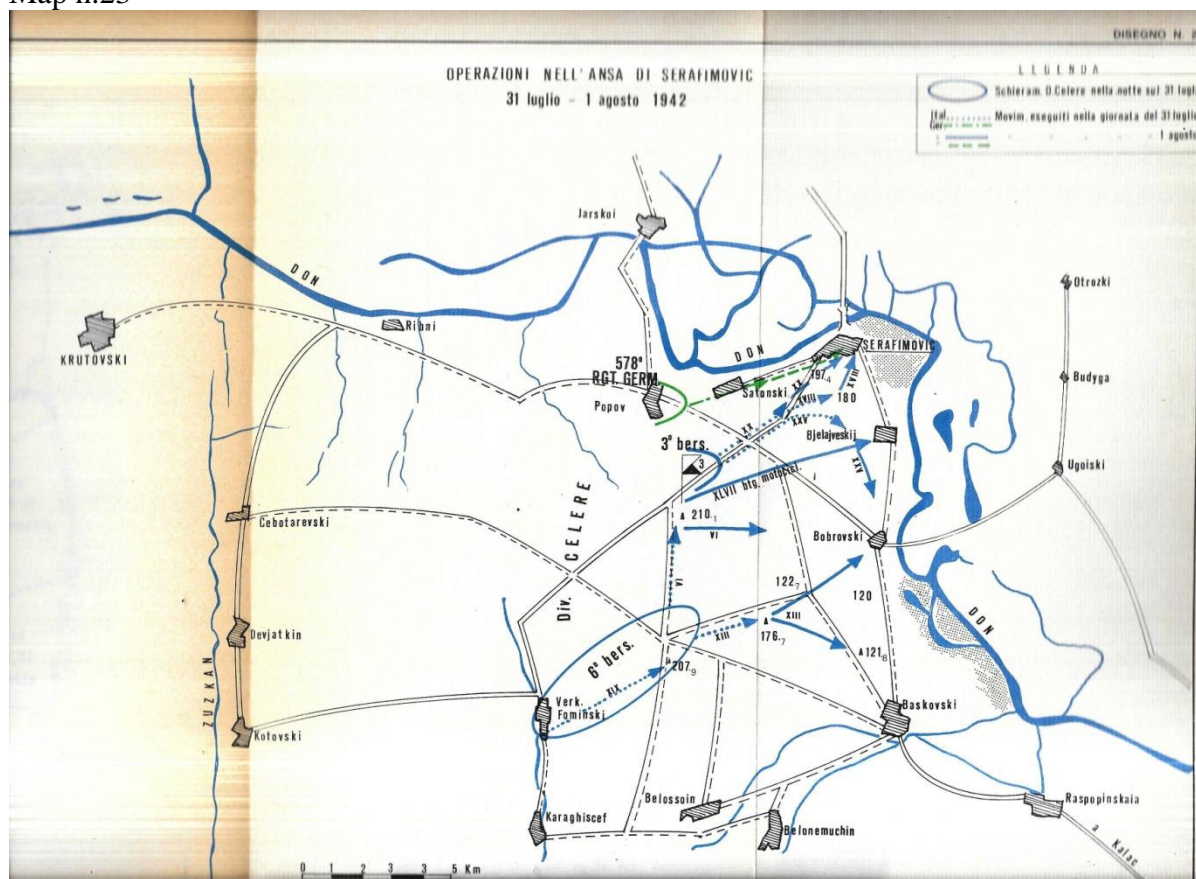
# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.22



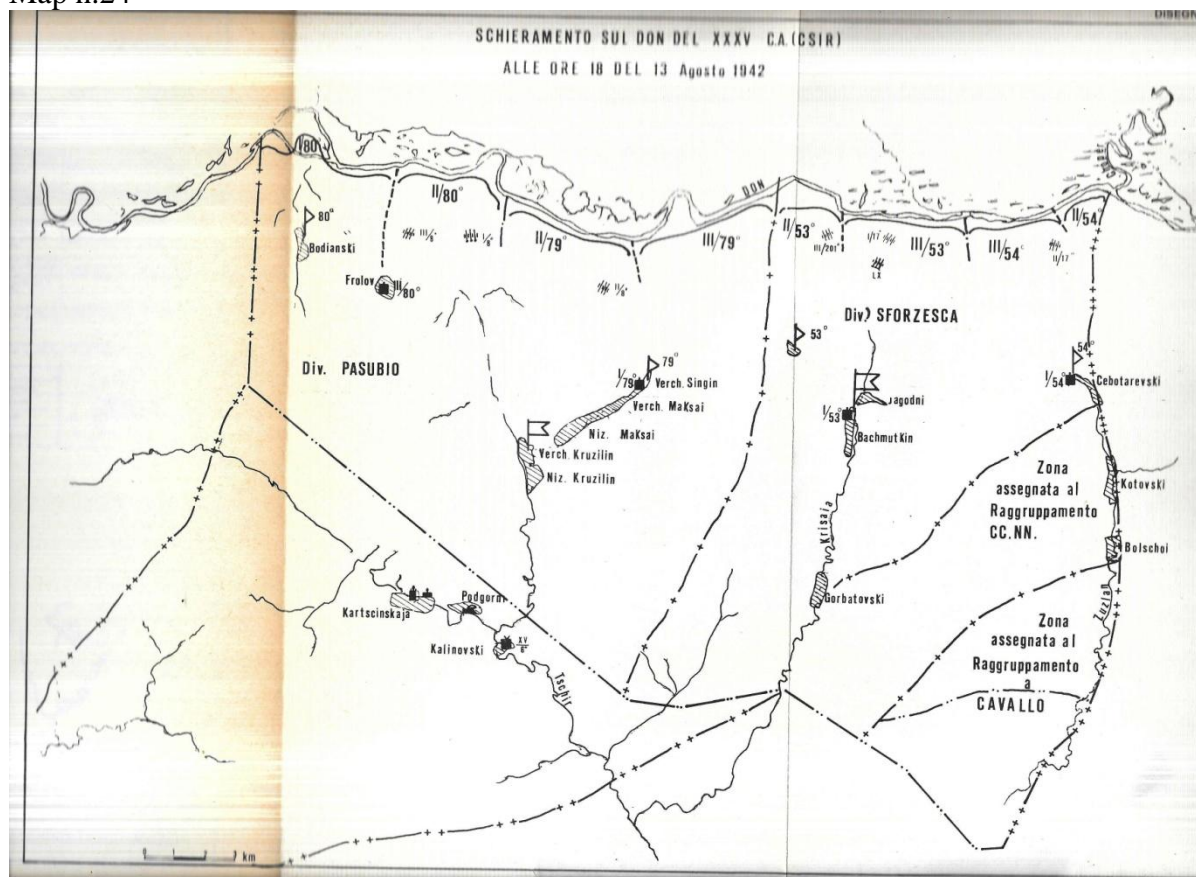
# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.23



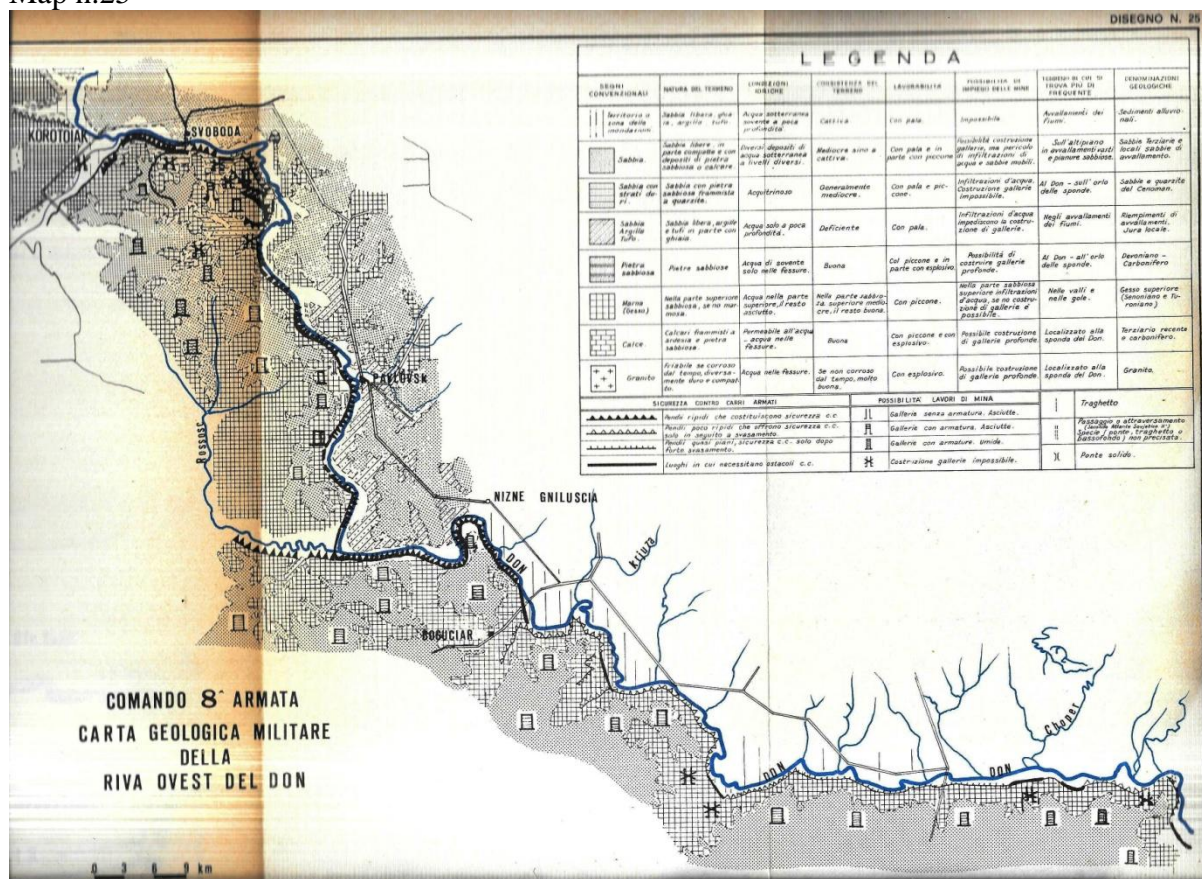
# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.24



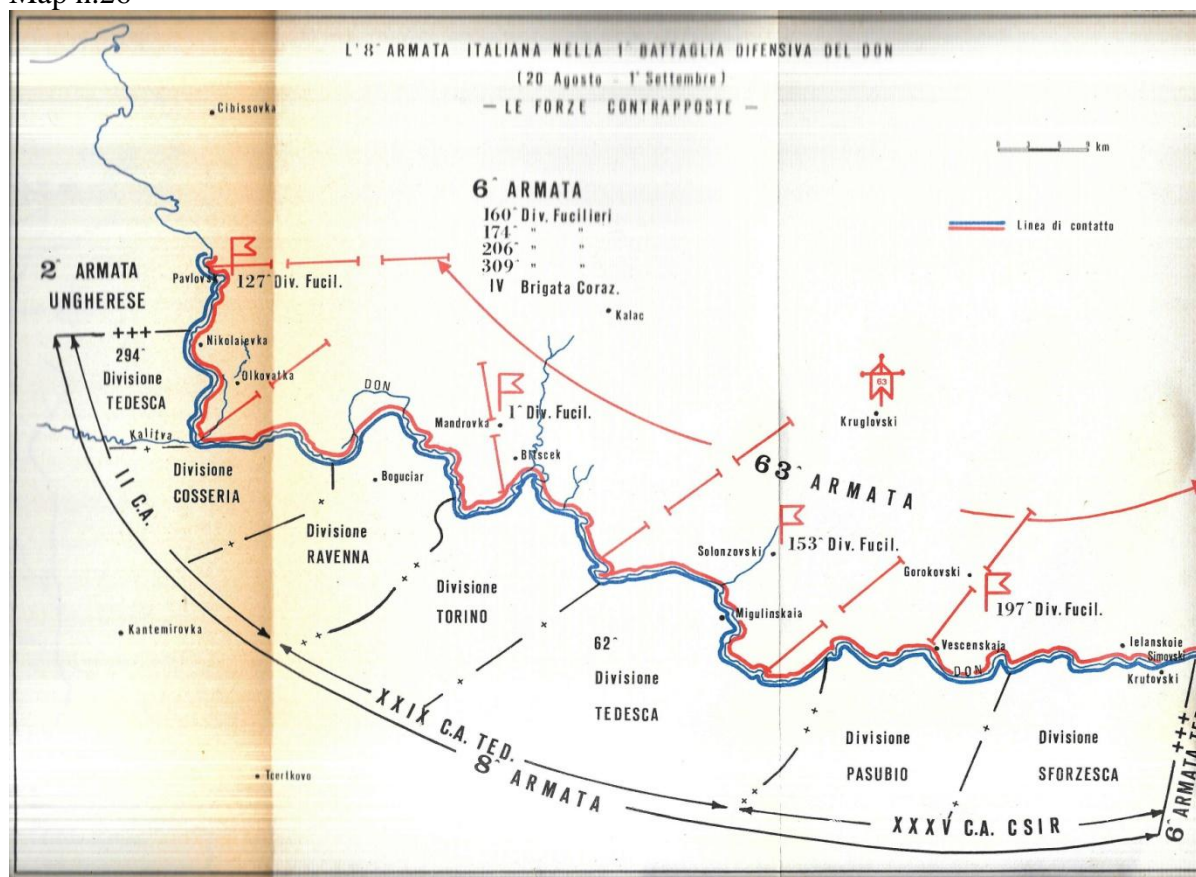


## Map n.25



# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

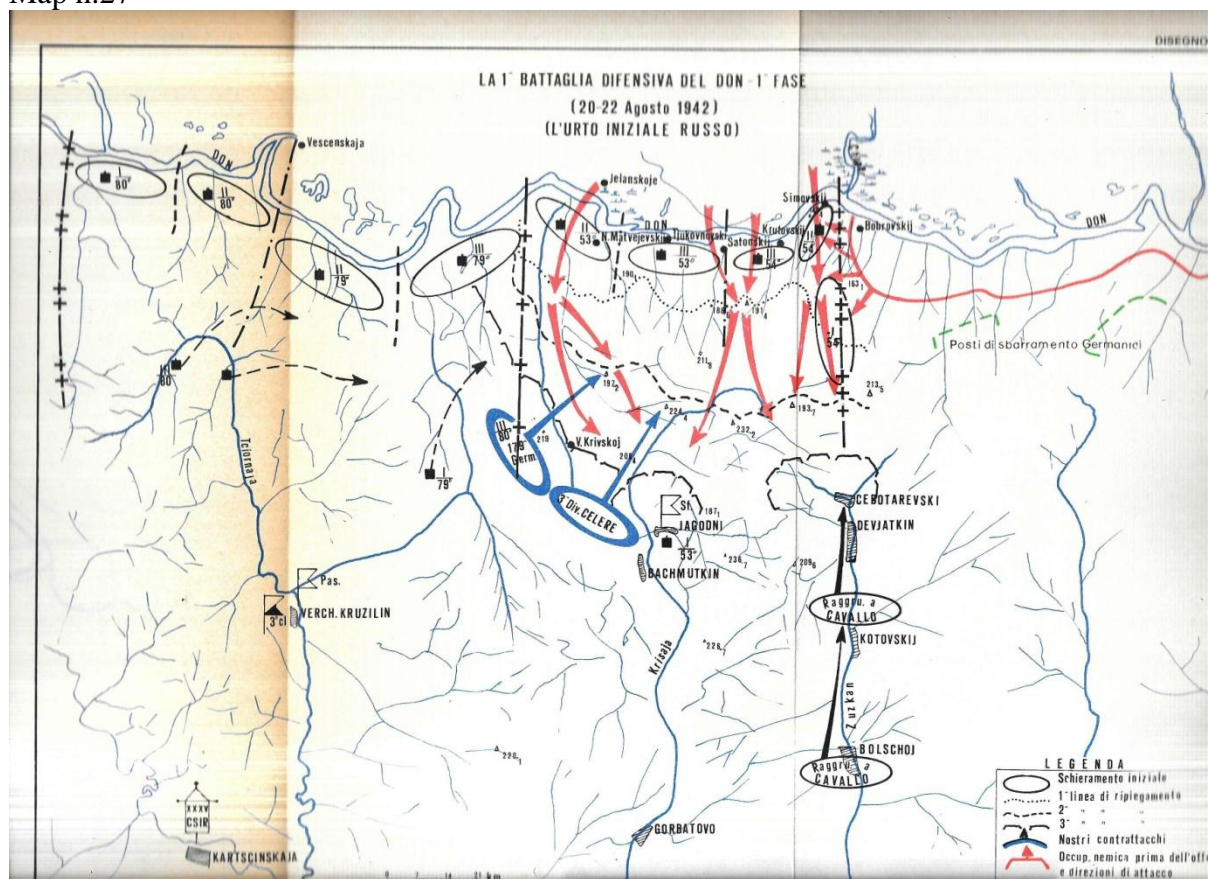
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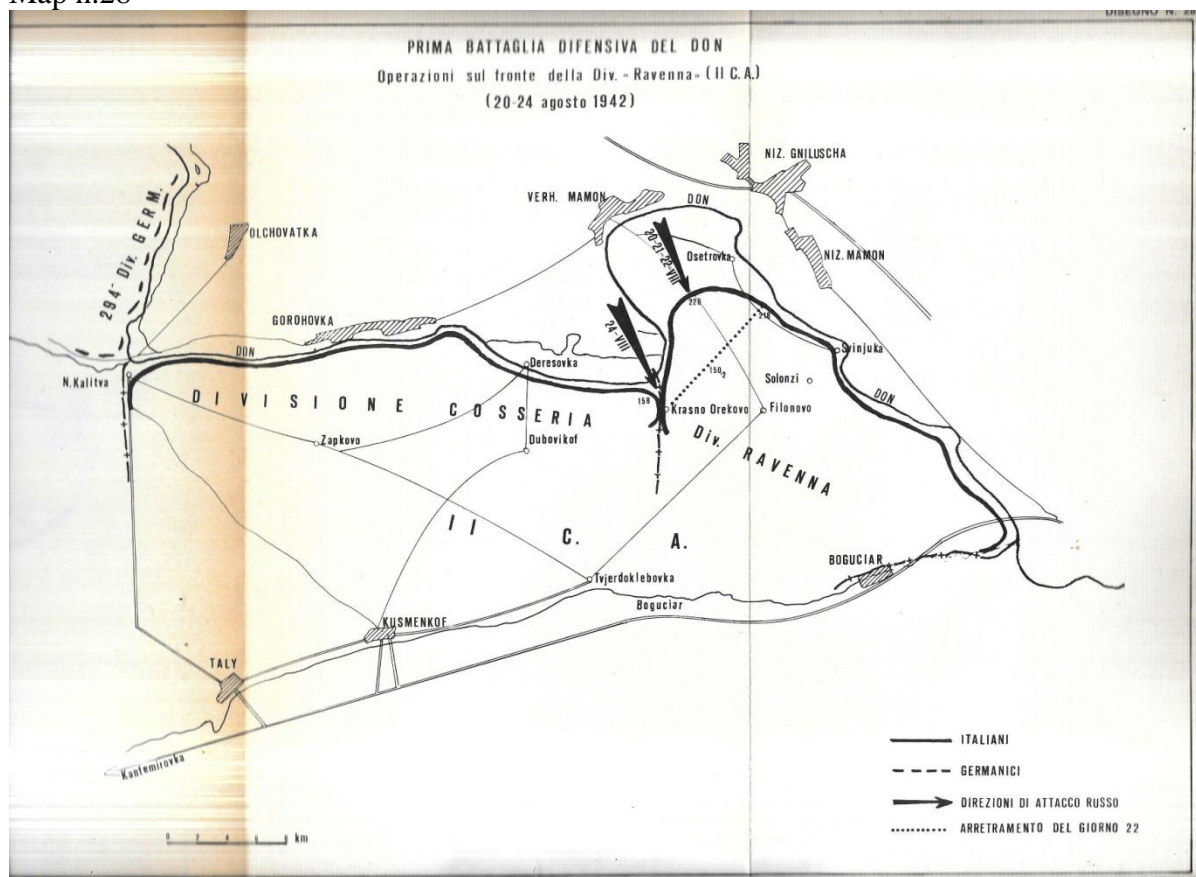
# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.27

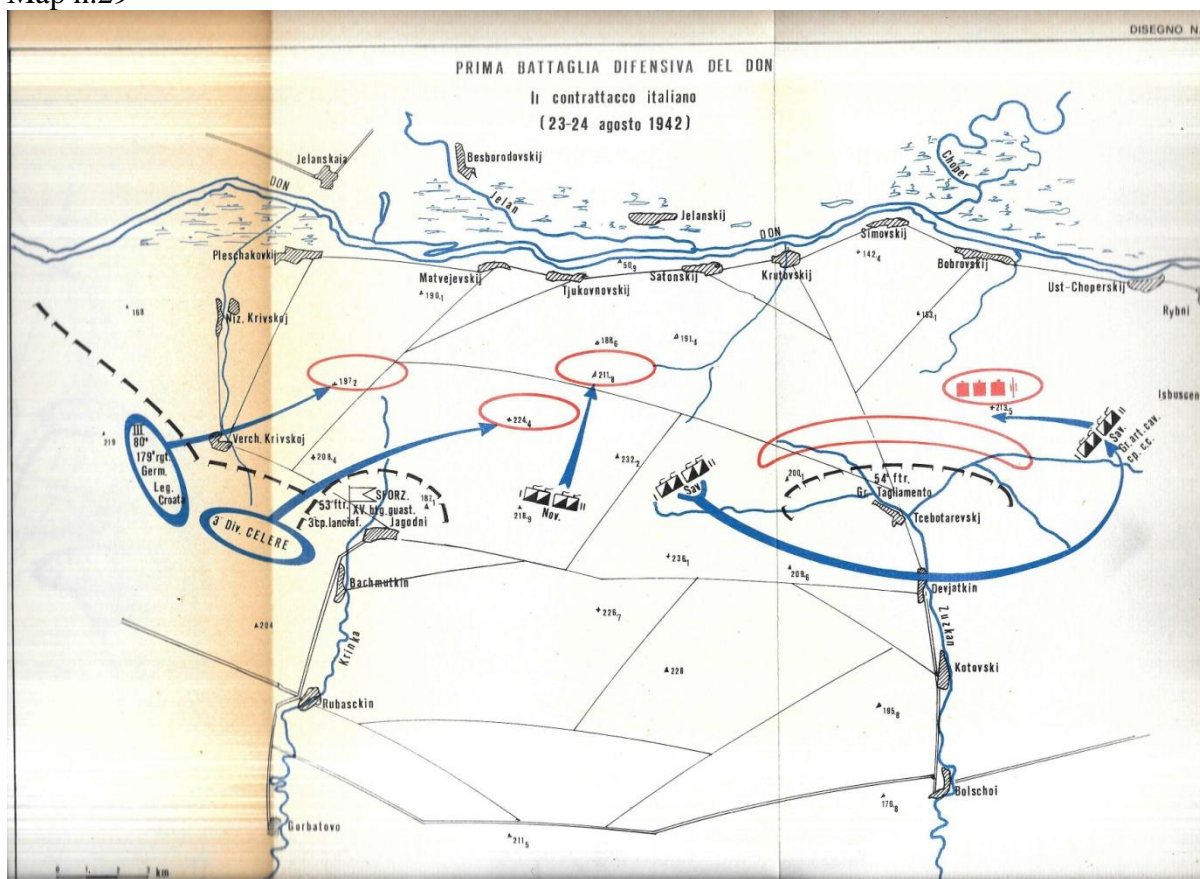


# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.28



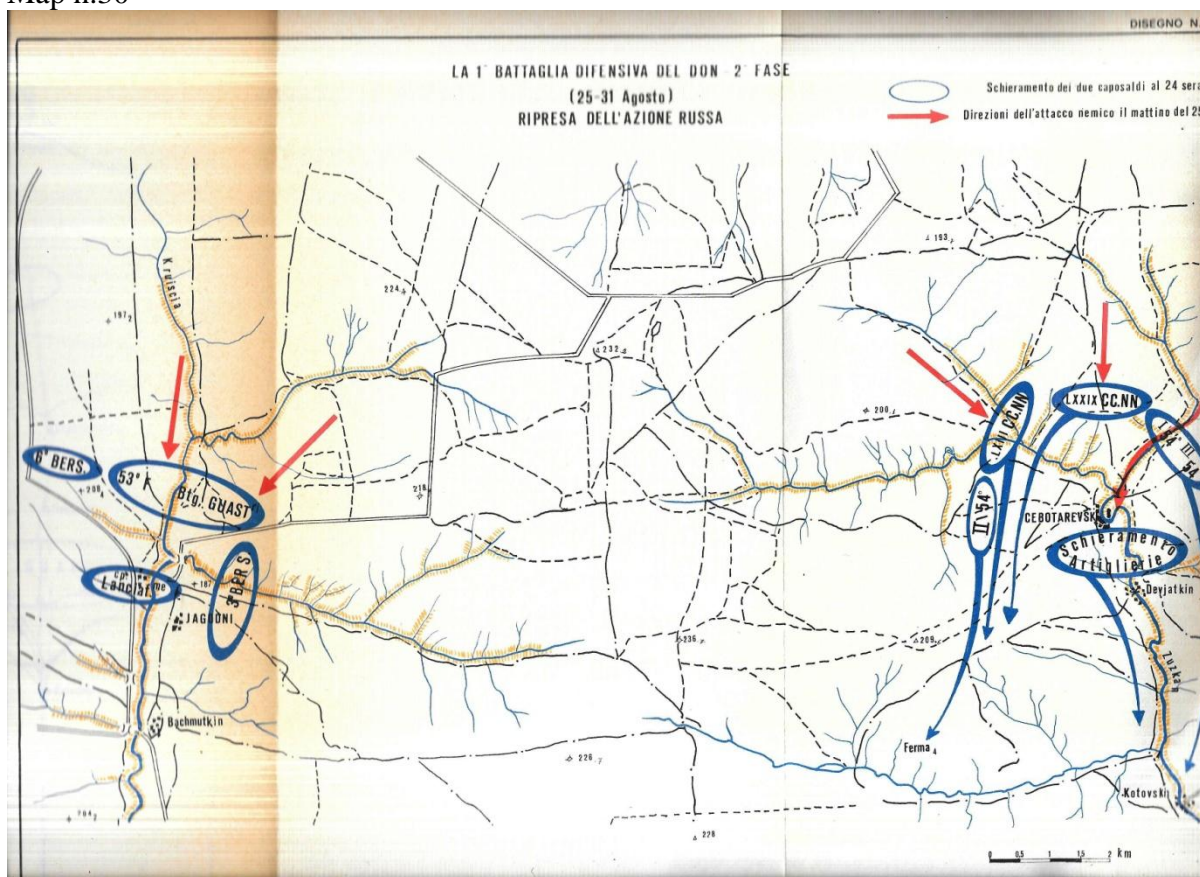
## Map n.29





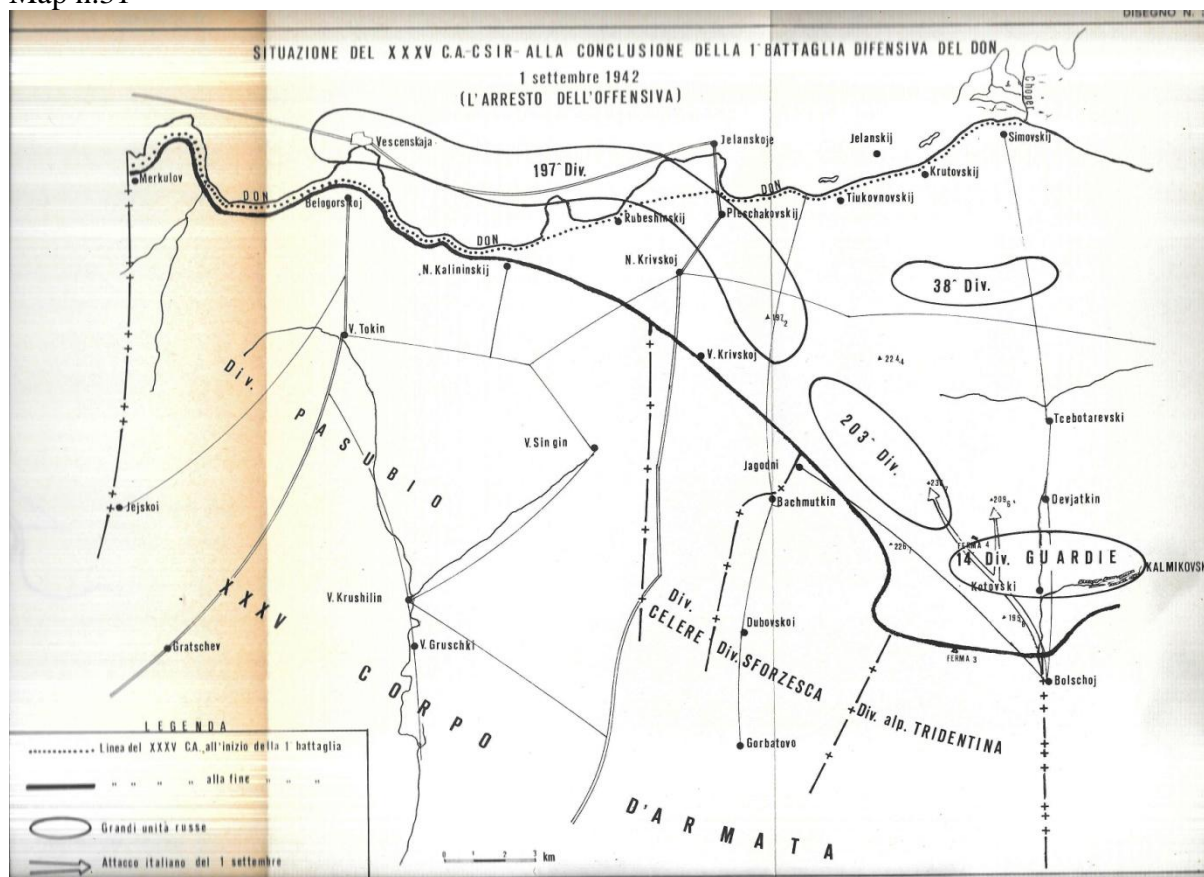
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Map n.30

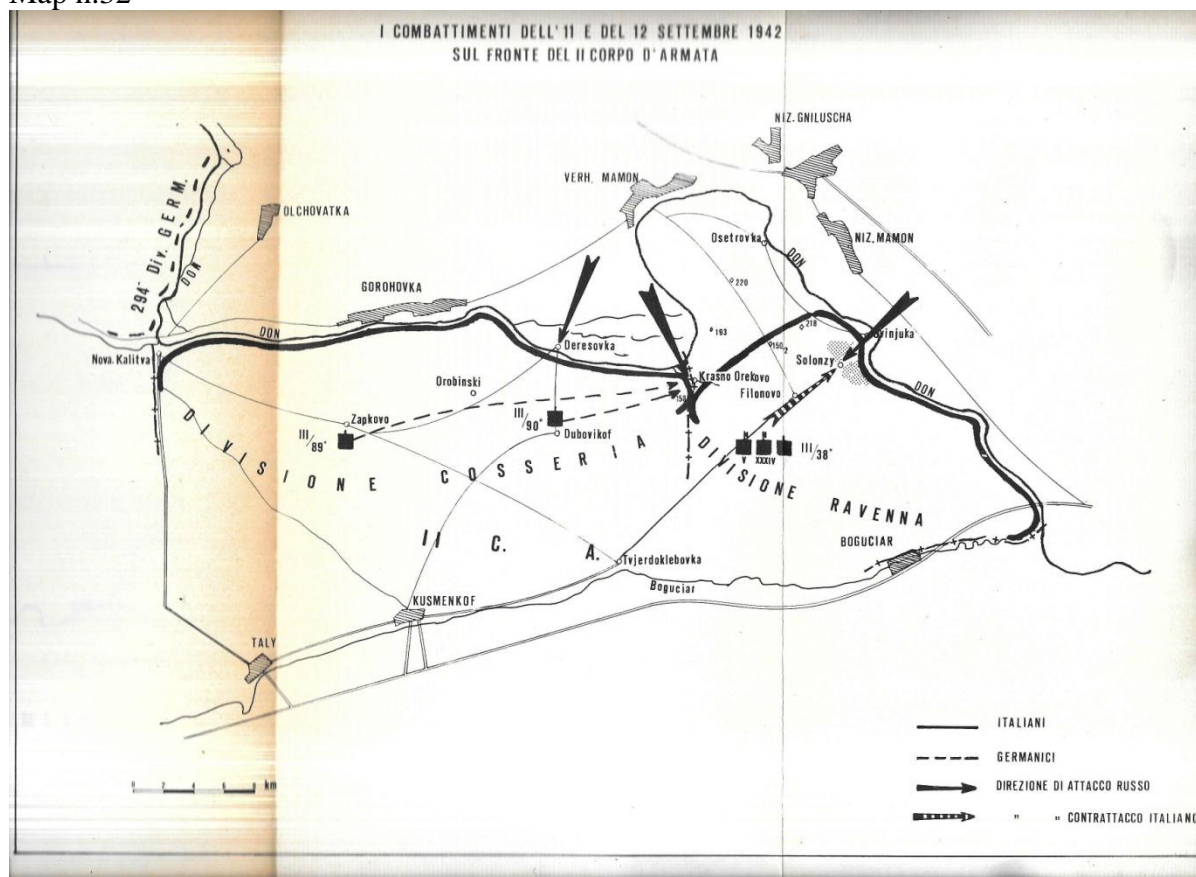


# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.31

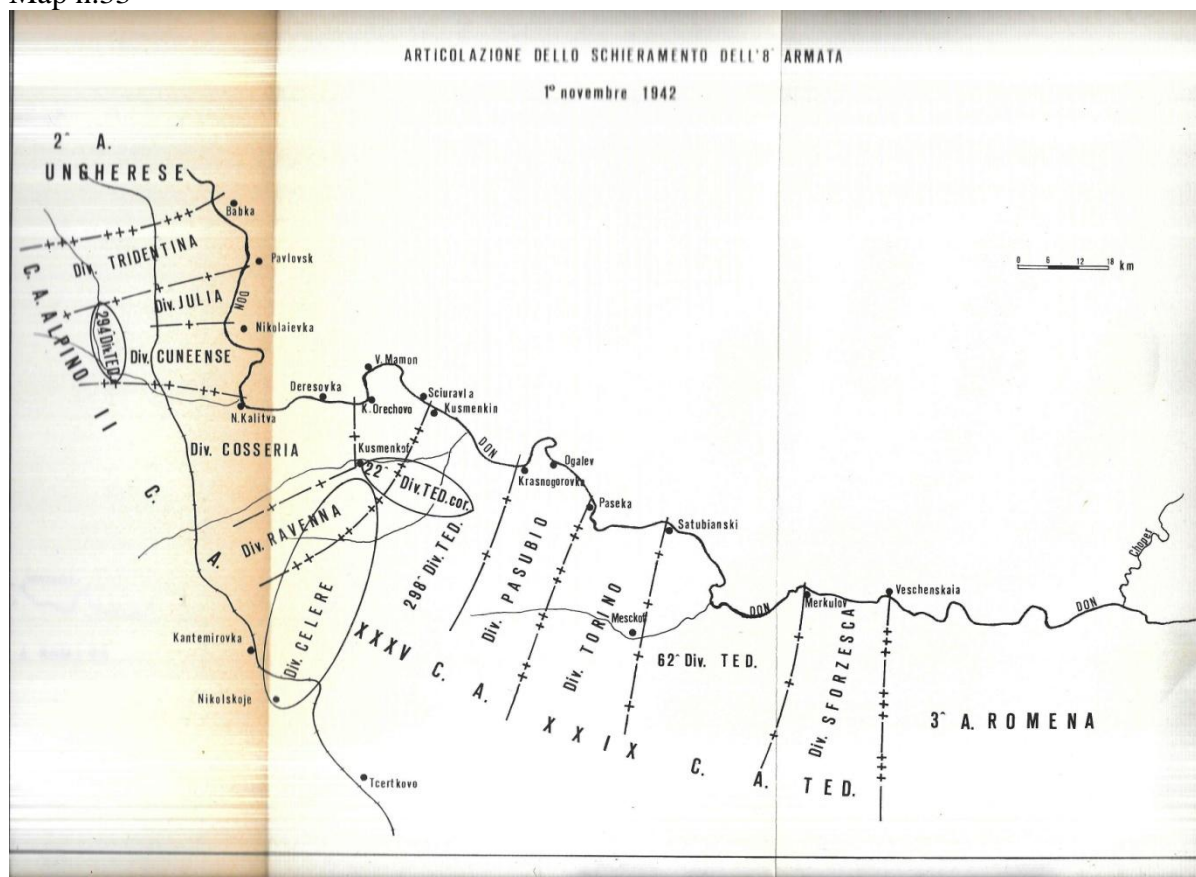


## Map n.32



# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

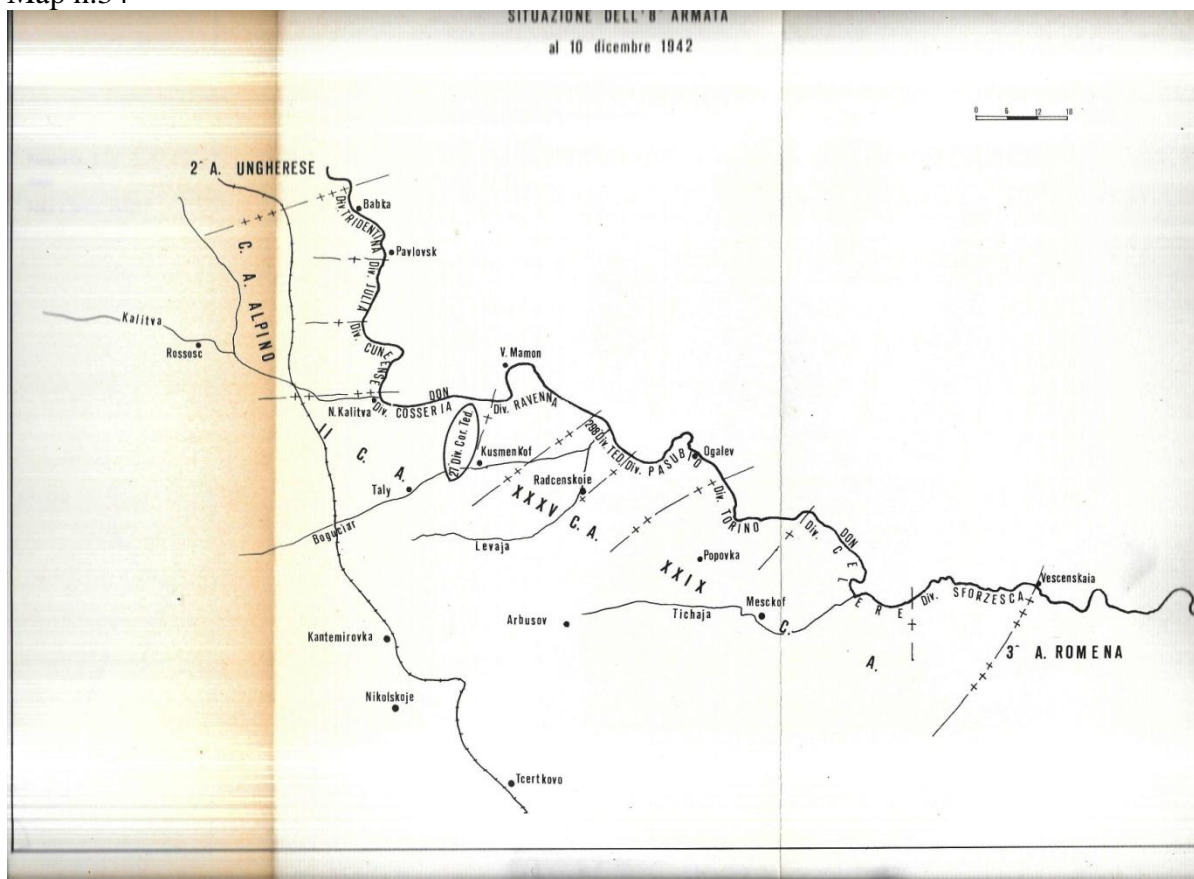
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# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

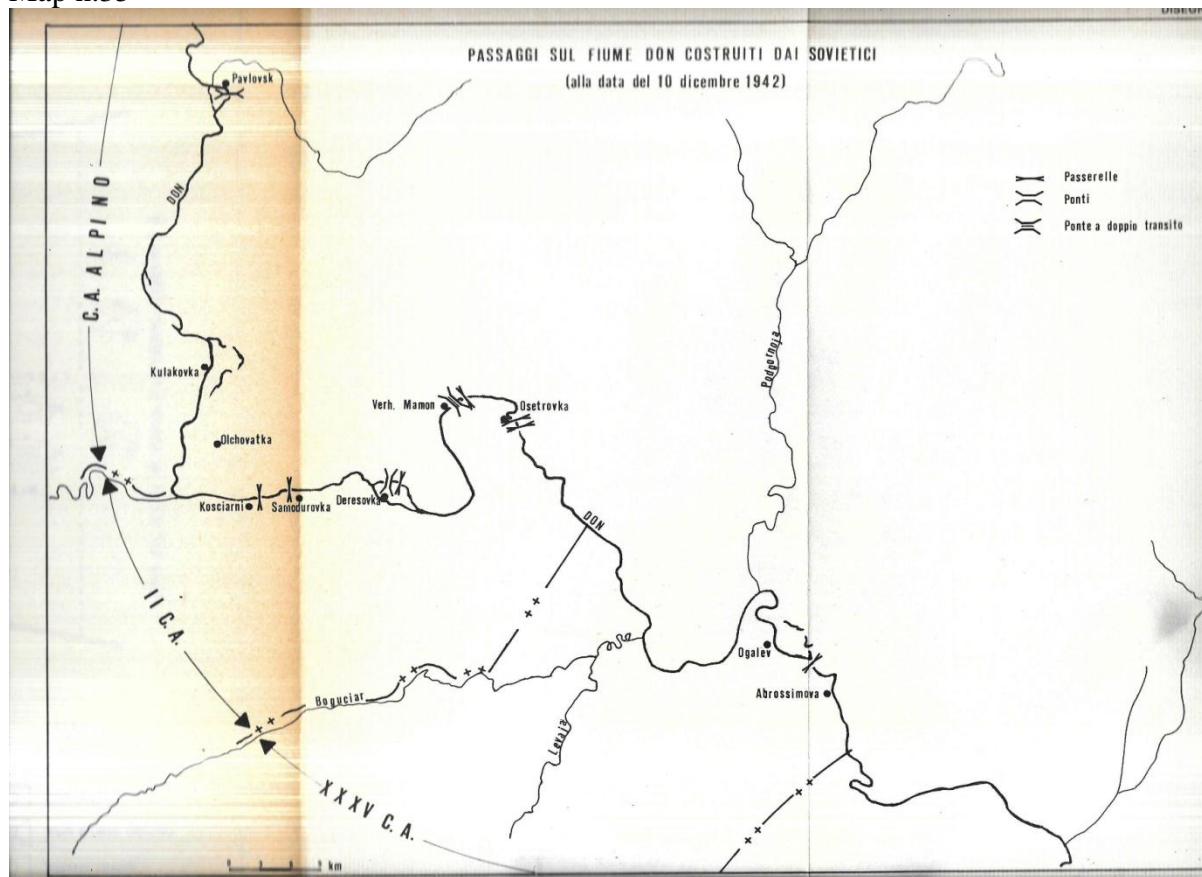
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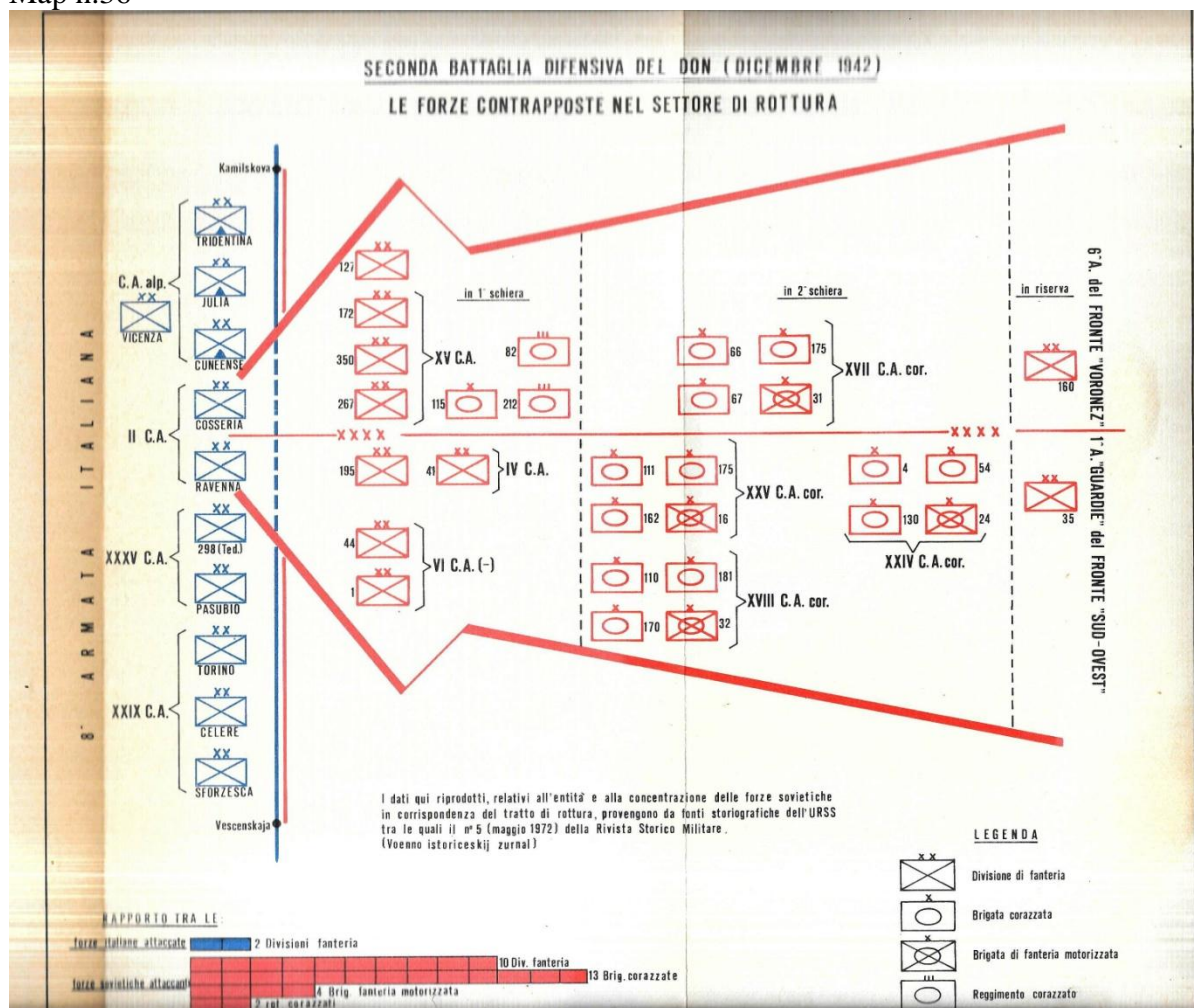
# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.35



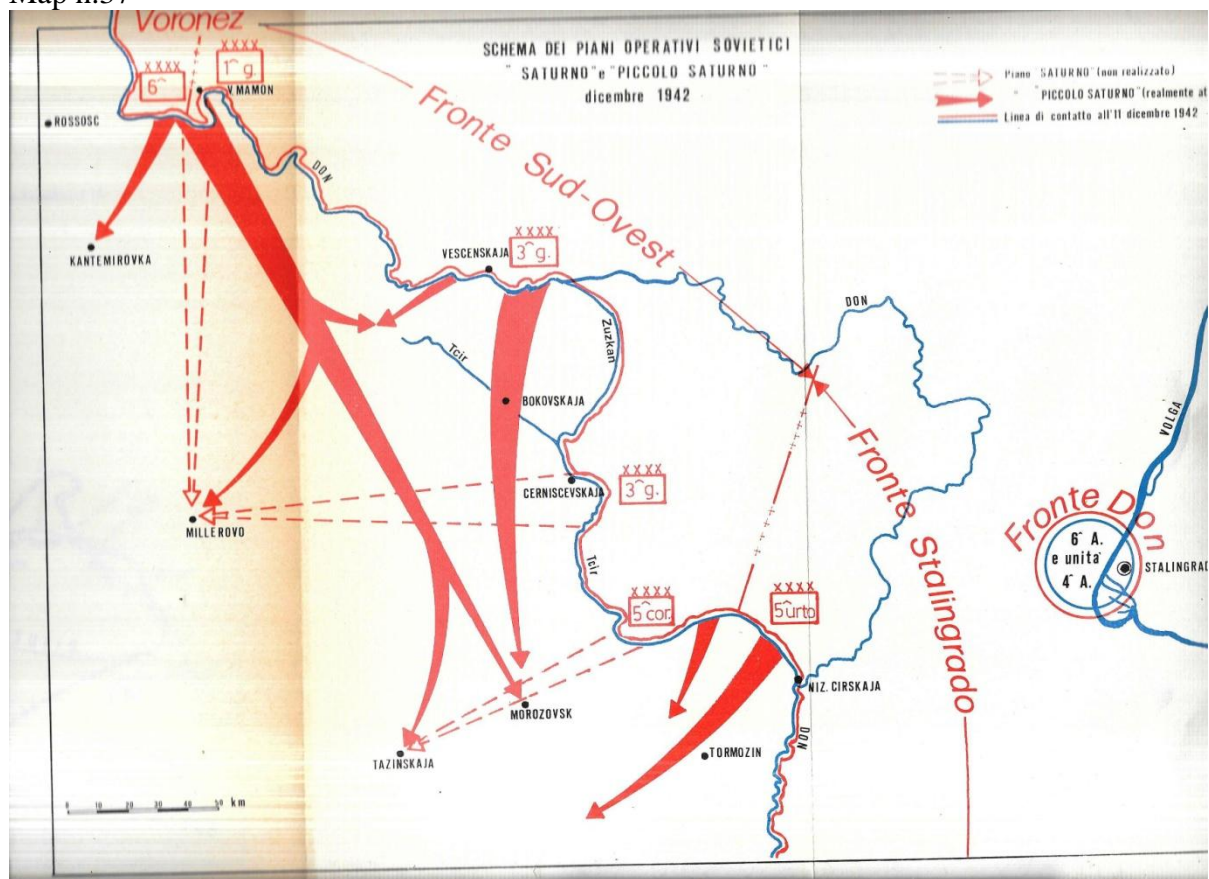
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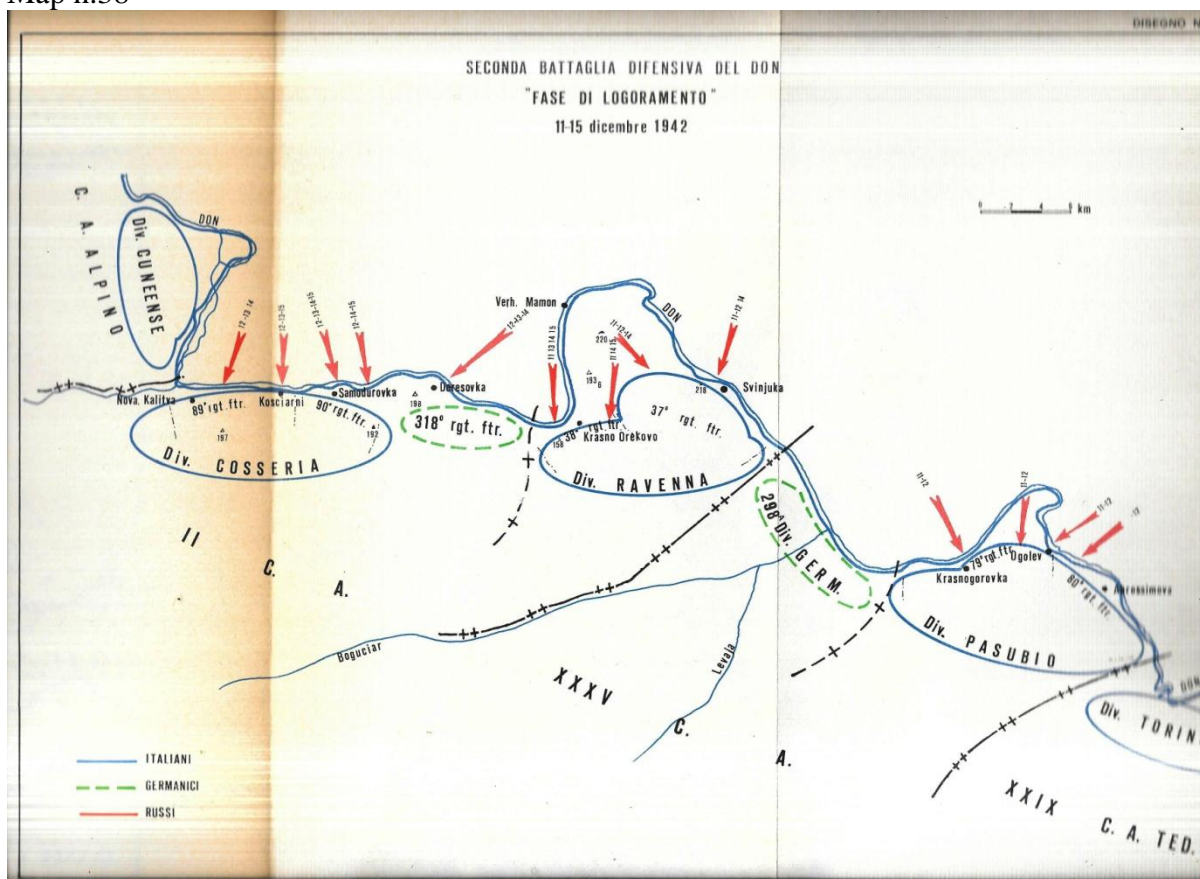
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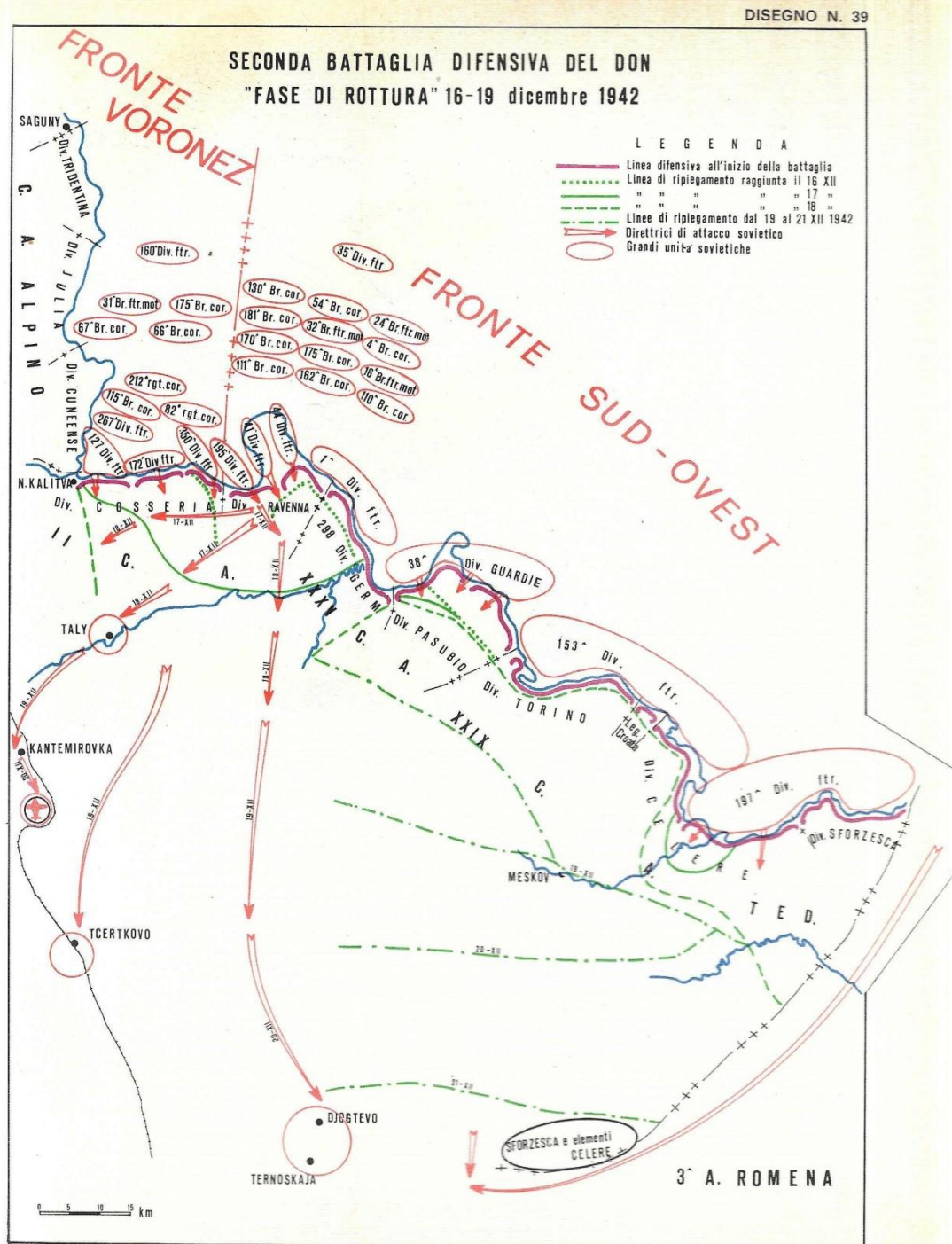
Map n.37



Map n.38

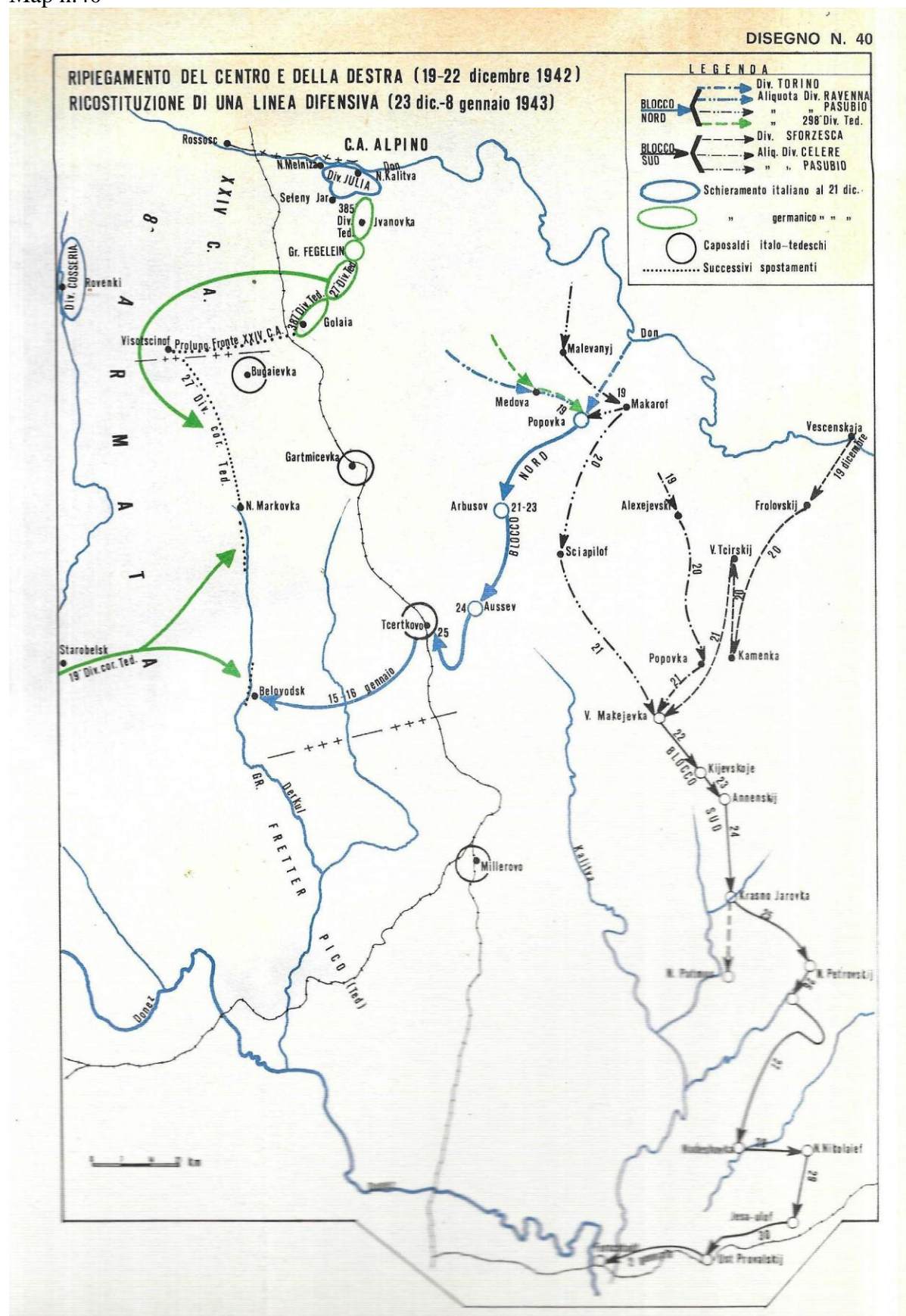


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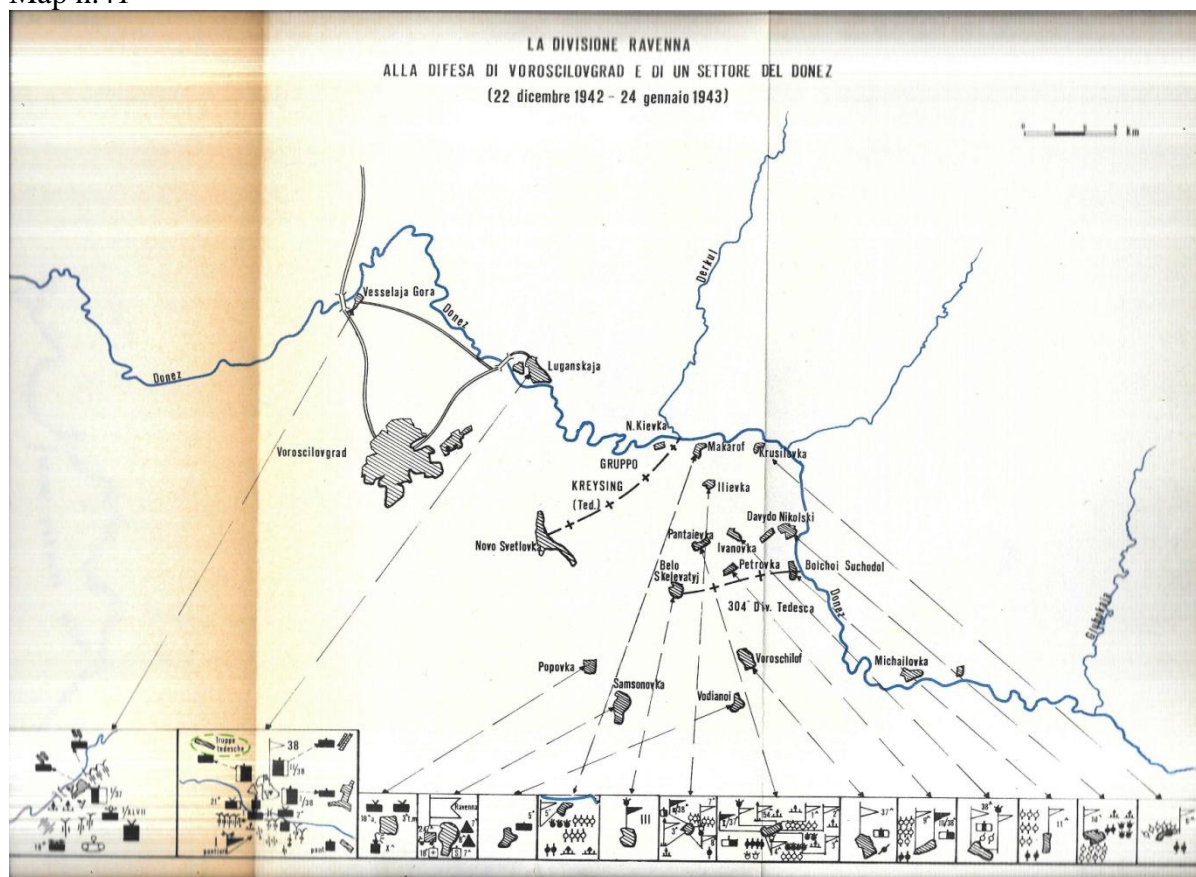
# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.40



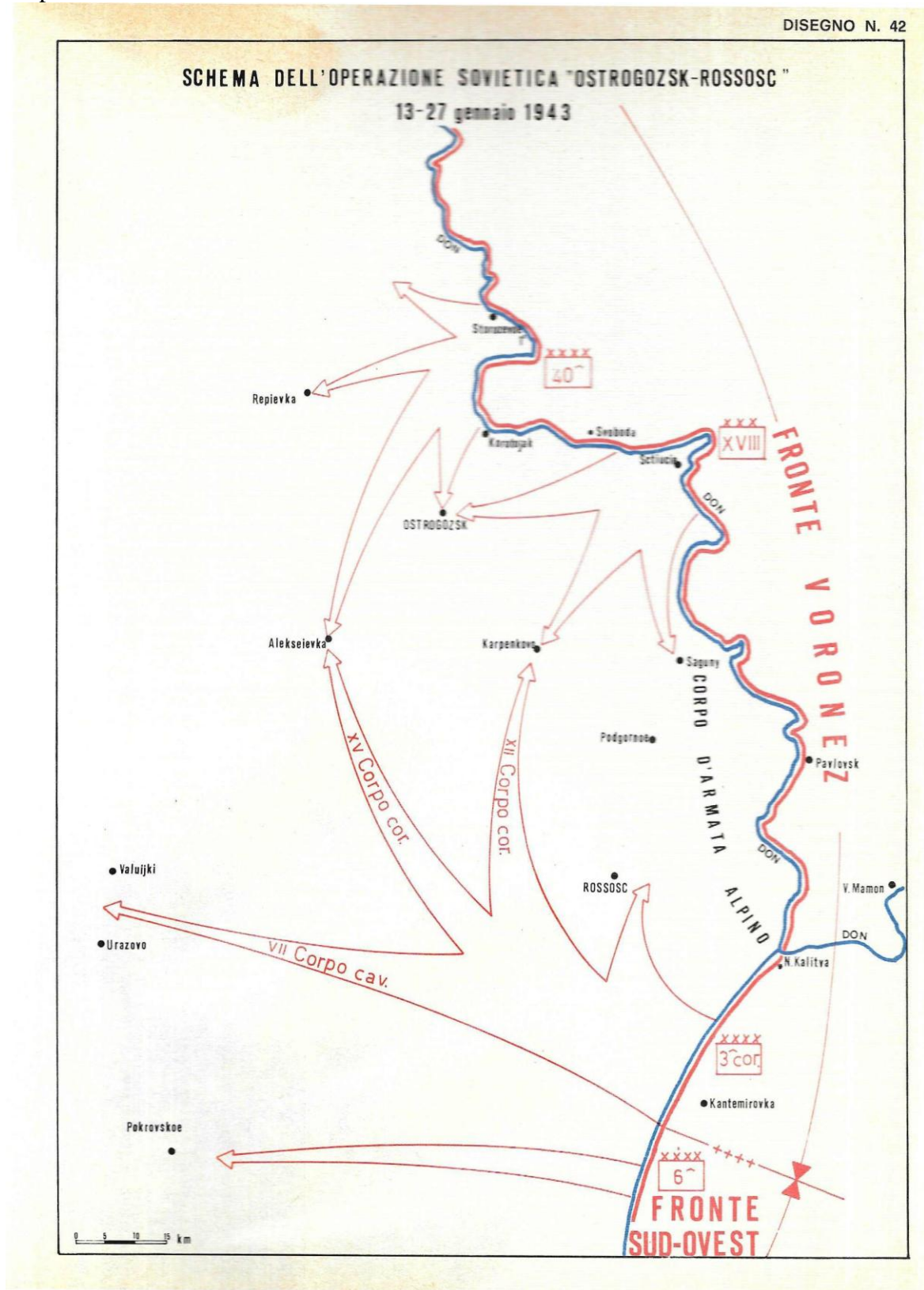


Map n.41



# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

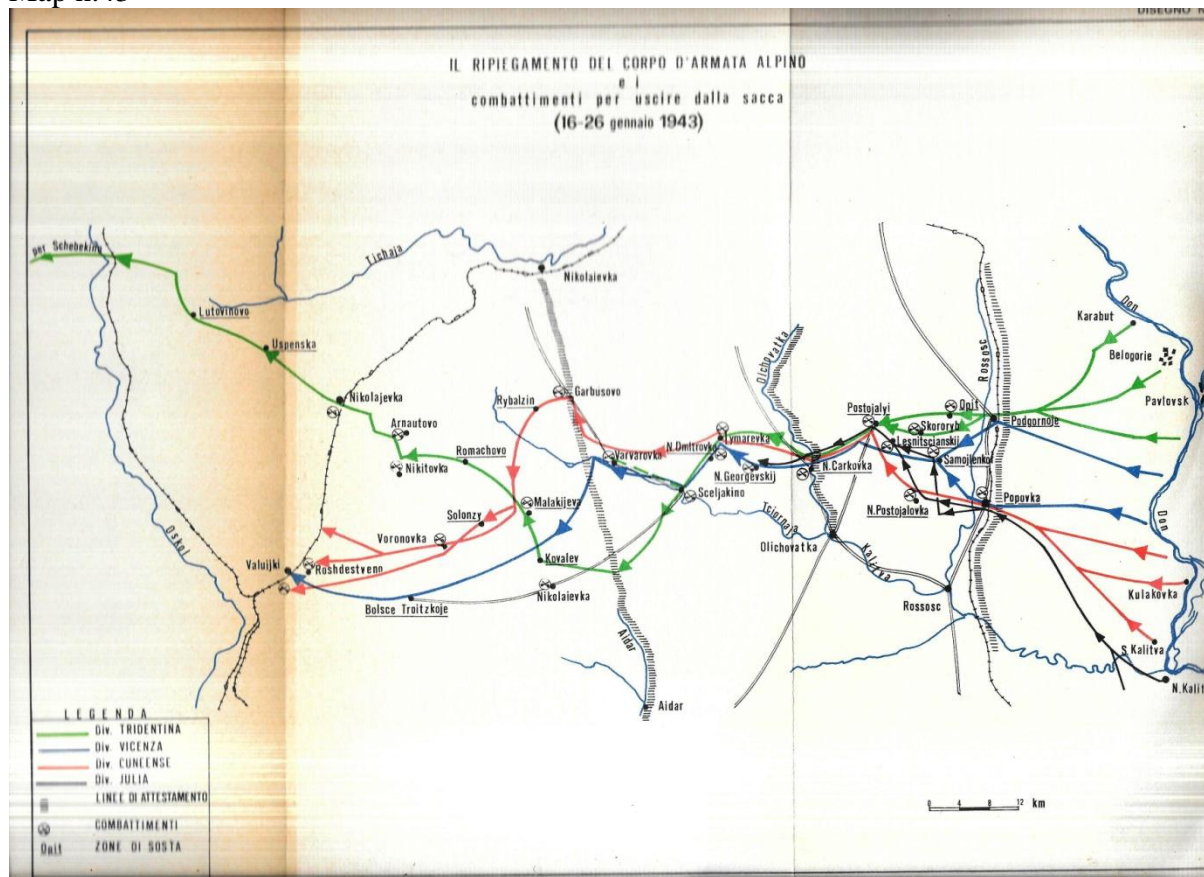
Map n.42





# Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

Map n.43



## Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)

### Pictures

## Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Fanti lungo una ferrovia.  
Visibile in primo piano la rotaia interrotta dalla macchina apposita posseduta dai sovietici.



Il Generale Messe decora al valor militare un fante della *Pasubio*.

Top: Infantry along a railway.  
Visible in the foreground damage to the tracks from soviet sabotage.

Bottom: General Messe decorates an infantryman for military valor.



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Combattenti del CSIR decorati al valor militare.



Un pezzo da 75/27 dell'8° reggimento artiglieria della Divisione *Pasubio* nel bacino minerario del Donez.

Top: Combatants of the CSIR decorated for military valor.

Bottom: A 75/27 gun of the 8<sup>th</sup> Artillery regiment of the *Pasubio* Division in the Donez mineral basin.



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Il Generale Messe impartisce ordini ad ufficiali per la conquista di Pavlograd. Ottobre 1941.



Centro di collegamenti avanzato zona del Donez. 1941 - 1942.

Top: General Messe give orders to officers for the conquest of Pavlograd. October 1941.

Bottom: Radio post in action in the Donez area. 1941-1942.

Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Difficoltà di marcia degli automezzi sulle vie di comunicazione impantanate. Autunno 1941.



Osservatorio dell'8° reggimento artiglieria divisionale *Pasubio* durante il combattimento di Zaritcianka. Settembre 1941.

Top: Difficulty of the march of vehicles in the bogged communications route. Autumn 1941.

Road Bogged Down.

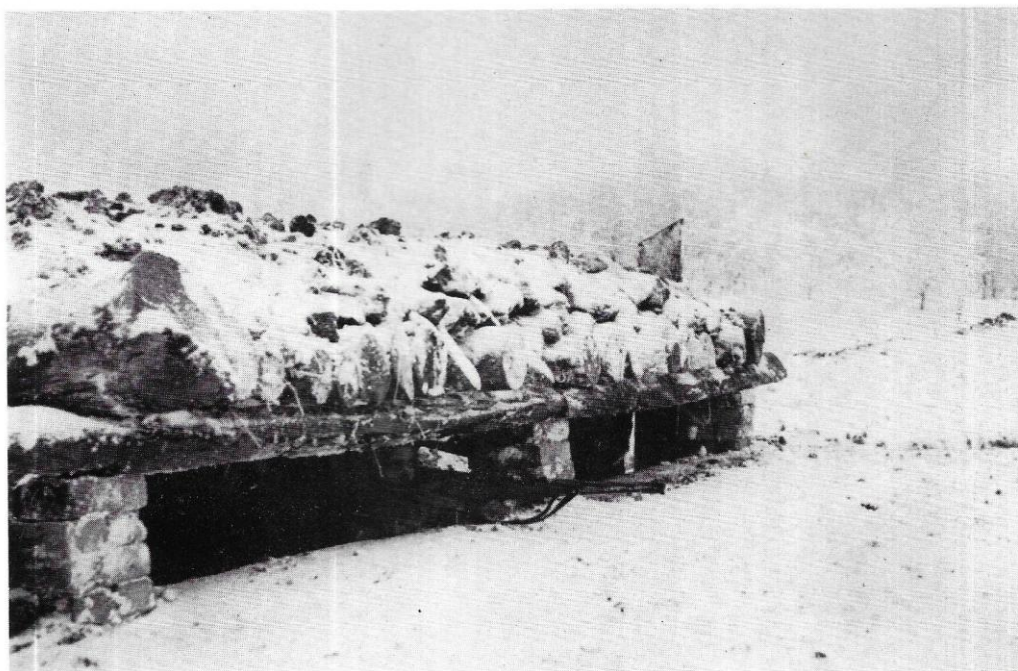
Bottom: Observers of the 8<sup>th</sup> artillery regiment of the *Pasubio* division during the battle of Zaritcianka. September 1941.



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Fanti in azione su di un corso d'acqua gelato.



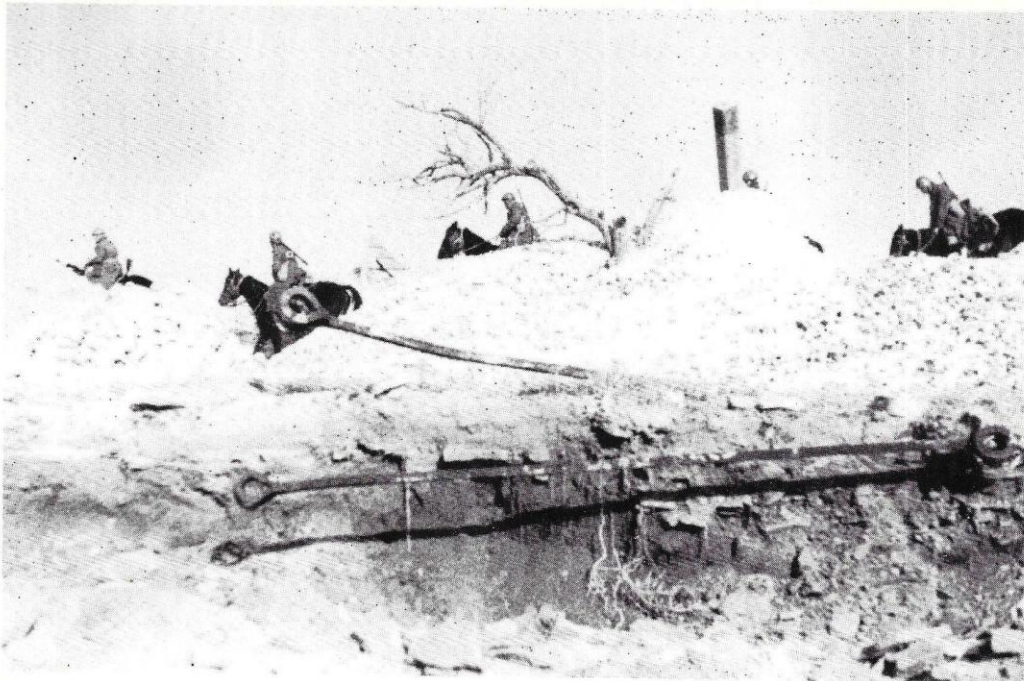
Postazione protetta con tronchi d'albero. Inverno 1941 - 1942.

Top: Infantry in action on the frozen water course.

Bottom: Post protected with tree trunks. Winter 1941-1942.



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Cavalleria in azione tra le macerie.



Alpini del battaglione sciatori *Monte Cervino*.

Top: Cavalry in action in the rubble.

Bottom: Alpine skiers battalion *Monte Cervino*.



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Lanciafiamme sul ghiaccio.



Pezzo controcarro da 47/32 in azione sulla neve.

Top: Flame thrower on the ice.

Bottom: A 47/32 anti-tank in action on the snow.

Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Mortaio da 81 in azione.

81 mm Mortar in action



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Vedetta in equipaggiamento invernale.

A lookout in winter uniform

Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Fanti in trincea.



Azione di pattuglie in un abitato.

Top: Infantry in a trench

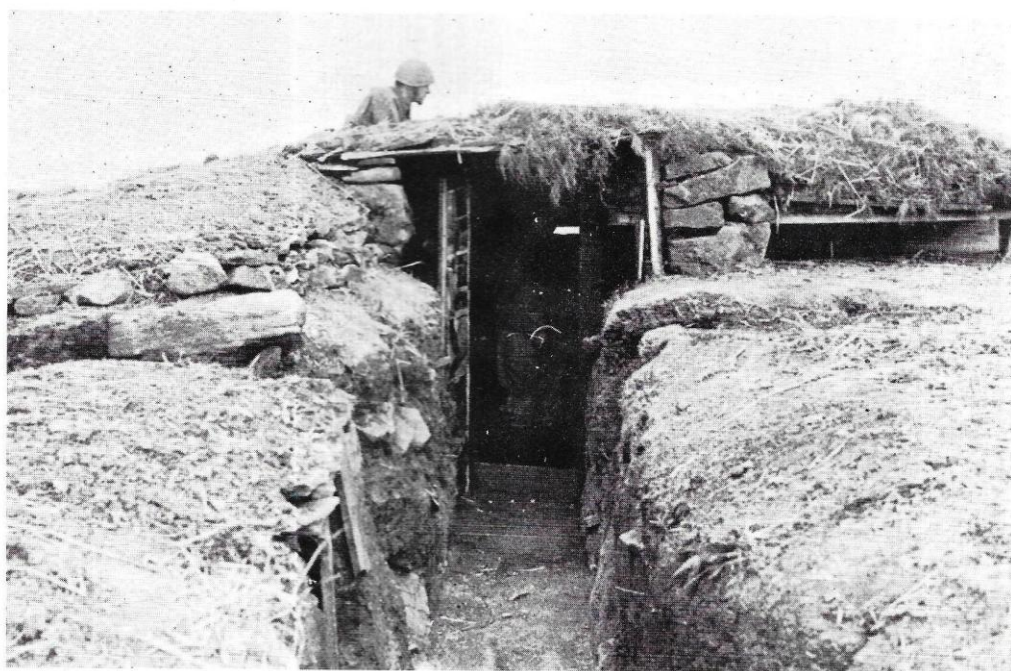
Bottom: Action of a patrol in a inhabited area



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Stamperia del giornale del CSIR «Dovunque».



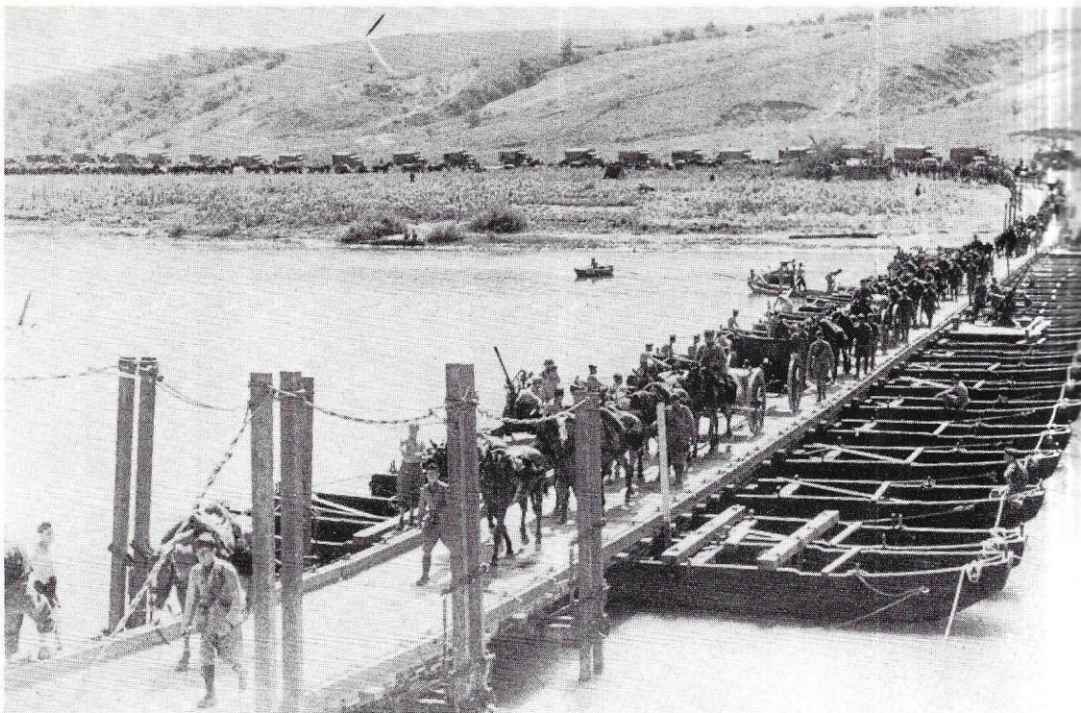
Ingresso ad un elemento di caposaldo.

Top: Newspaper printing of the CSIR “Dovunque”

Bottom: Entrance to a strongpoint’s bunker



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Il reggimento artiglieria a cavallo  
transita sul ponte di equipaggio sul Donez, a Luganskaja. Luglio 1942.



I fanti della Divisione *Torino* dividono il rancio con i bambini russi.

Top: The artillery regiment on horseback transits on the crew deck on the Donez, in Luganskaja. July 1942.

Bottom: The infantrymen of the *Torino* Division divide the ration with the Russian children.



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Colonna di fanti nel centro di Vorosilovgrad.  
Luglio 1942.



Targhe stradali italiane e tedesche.

Top: Column of infantrymen in the center of Voroshilovgrad. July 1942

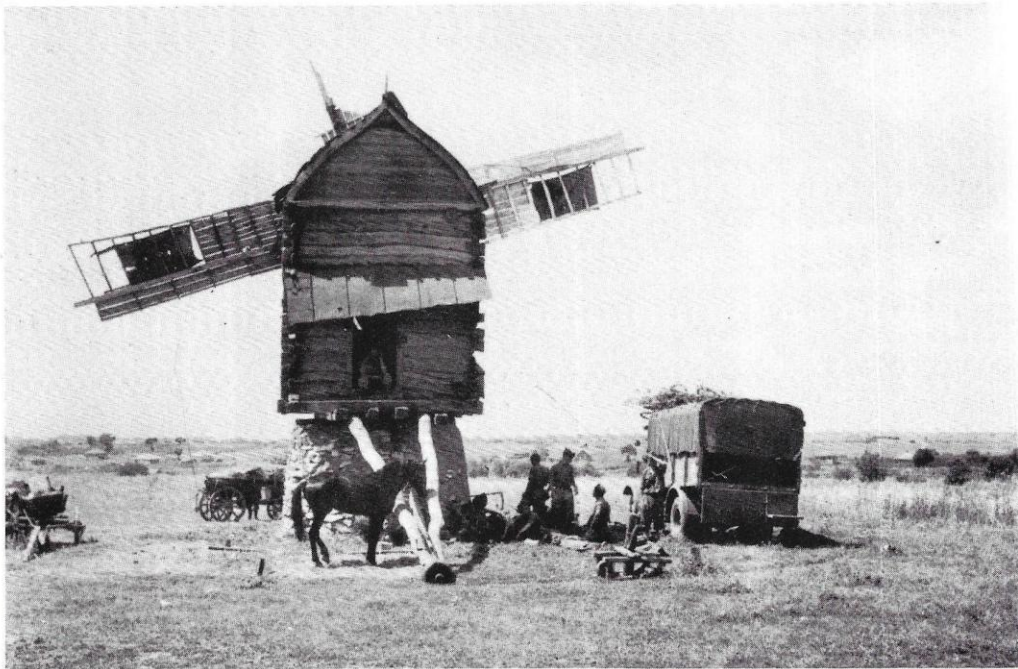
Bottom: Italian and German road signs.



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Il Comandante dell'8<sup>a</sup> Armata, Generale Gariboldi,  
a colloquio con il Comandante del II Corpo d'Armata, Generale Zanghieri,  
ed il Capo di S.M. della Divisione Sforzesca, Ten. Colonnello Fiore.  
Ponte di Luganskaja, fine luglio 1942.



Osservatorio di artiglieria in un molino a vento della zona del Don.

Top: The Commander of the 8th Army, General Gariboldi, in conversation with the Commander of the II Army Corps, General Zanghieri, and the Chief of staff of the Sforza Division, Lt. Colonel Fiore.  
Luganskaja Bridge, end of July 1942.

Bottom: Artillery observatory in a windmill in the Don area.



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Il corso del Don nel settore della Divisione *Torino*.



Paese della sponda destra del Don.

Top: The course of the Don in the Turin Division sector.

Bottom: Country of the right bank of the Don.



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Linea pezzi della 1<sup>a</sup> batteria di cannoni controcarro da 75/32 (mod. 37)  
del I gruppo del 201<sup>o</sup> reggimento artiglieria.



Posto comando del battaglione alpini Gemona (Divisione Julia). Dicembre 1942.

Top: Line pieces of the first 75/32 counter-tank gun (model 37) of the 1st group of the 201 artillery regiment.

Bottom: Command post of the Gemona Alpine battalion (Julia Division). December 1942.



Operations of Italian units on the Russian Front (1941 - 1943)



Riunione di un reparto sovietico  
per l'orientamento sull'offensiva contro l'8<sup>a</sup> Armata italiana, nel dicembre 1942.



Fanteria sovietica in combattimento per la conquista di Tcertkovo.  
Dicembre 1942 - gennaio 1943.

Top: Meeting of a Soviet department for orientation on the offensive against the 8th Italian Army, in December 1942.

Bottom: Soviet infantry fighting for the conquest of Tcertkovo. December 1942- January 1943

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"SELECTION"  
CULTURAL INFORMATION CENTER  
VIA FRANCOLINI, 3 – RIMINI

FRANCO MARROCCO  
GIUSEPPE TABACCO

In collaboration with the Contemporary Artistic Research Documentation Center  
"L. Di Sano"- Viale G. Cesare, 71 – Rome

16/30 SEPTEMBER 1989

## FRANCO MARROCCO

The most recent paintings by Franco Marrocco are emotional situations captured on the life of a passionate participation in the provocation set up in the imagination of the painter from the close evocation of a psychological event, a meeting, an impact with nature.

The pictorial writing is fresh, wide, immediate, involving, aggregated around a nucleus of image that on the canvas reveals itself as a circumstantiated evoked emotional situation. An image that is configured from time to time different, because it does not correspond to a structural recurrence, but is defined from time to time in the evoked emotional circumstance. And an image always involved in a fullness of participatory passion, so that the evocation loses every memory distance, and it becomes a present, immediate occasion, in turn involving the spectator.

Two years ago I was writing about the increasingly accentuated importance of the emotional event as determining the meaning and configuration of Marrocco's painting. Which was formulated, as is still the case today, substantially in the urgency of existential reasons, and even almost explicitly autobiographical. Existential realism in particular, therefore, his until then, I emphasized on this occasion, however, precisely configured in the dimension of the story-remembrance-confession. Realism of memorial theater, at the bottom. It is therefore a realistic force of evocative intensity, aimed at meaningful events in an affective-passional sense. In Marrocco's painting there was in fact no filter between emotional drives and the constitution of images if not memory. And during the early eighties Marrocco represented his own existential "existence" in fragments configuring circumscribed situations and emblematically evocative of his affective-passionate experience. His participation in the quadrennial in Rome in 1986 with the great triptych *On my sky fly also the angels*, of that same year, practically concluded that experience of existential memorial figuration, on which certainly the most recent work is based, and from which, however, at the same time Marrocco's new work diverges sensibly, aiming rather at a more relaxed immediateness of emotional-evocative pictorial writing.

In Marrocco's painting, however, there are no jumps, but there is a very consequent evolution from one way of his research and another, intimately connected and yet evolutionary. And so the liberation from narrative figurative elements has brought naturally between 1987 and 88 to a pictorial writing that was freer and more ready, in a correspondence that was more direct to the emotional implication. When he resorted to figurative elements, Marrocco recomposed them in a sort of memorial citation, thus constructing his own painting through a simultaneity of coherent formal elements, arranged almost in an implicit hierarchy of importance in the emotional-evocative process. Today his pictorial writing has become at the same time wider and more synthetic. The pictorial gesture develops freely around an emotional event whose presence tends to amortize the distance of the memory, and the multiplicity of the evocative affluences, in a single situation, whose tension becomes more present and immediate in its capacity for involvement.

Marrocco works willingly on a human scale today, as well as in past years. That is, on large canvases with which it is dimensionally compared according to a sort of anthropometric parameter. Thus, he enters the space of the canvas in a certain way, he lives it not mentally, but directly through a gesture commensurate with the physical dimension of his existential behavior. But, if this occurred in the expressionist configuration of the evoked memory of an emotional and passionate circumstance lived, translated precisely into the figuration, now happens instead that the image arises immediately as an apparition within the context of a unitary complexity (since around that substantially configured) of pictorial signs that the gesture determines in a rapid but dense draft. Not that the image nucleus of his painting has failed; is that this is no longer figurative (it is no longer in short a presence of figure), but in a certain way lived on the canvas as a real event in its constitution of emotional impact.

On the other hand, his imagination now seems to have also freed him from the pressure of an autobiographical account, in favor of a sort of direct emotional autobiography. If in recent years he narrated and figured situations of his own experience, now Marrocco confesses the rich passion of his lived experience in a reference that becomes less circumstantial as a story, and more open to an evocation of emotional occasions of memories of nature, affective, or childhood, in a sort of panic distension.

*Enrico Crispolti*

## GIUSEPPE TABACCO

The artistic work of Giuseppe Tabacco follows two opposing orientations. In fact there is on one hand a production of works that favors the material itself in a dry and clean weave of ropes on unpainted canvas surfaces, on the other hand, instead, the scanning of that material is incorporated or coexisted with a skilful painting that of painter makes his subject.

Revisiting the stages of the artistic path of Tabacco read the origins of that painting. A solid knowledge of the artists of the twentieth century shows the preferences and the "passions" of the artist, whose origin is certainly from the world of painting, from that culture of the brush that has marked fundamental and famous poetics in the gesture. Among those who, paraphrasing the lexicon of cinema, we can define the cult-painters of twentieth century art history Pollock is found, but also Wols, Burri and Fontana, Afro and a few others. Painting therefore arises as a real subject of the artist's poetics, but the apparent subject is a sort of landscape without geography, whose only landscape element is the horizon.

It could be defined as a landscape of the limit, or of the threshold, but perhaps it is better than the border. It is the same that closes the eye to the gaze, which marks an end, but which, at the same time, opens to many unexpected events, which have no end, or of which it has not been known.

The picture, then, becomes like a missile launched towards space, whose only certainty is the unknown destination. The ropes, therefore, that fasten the canvas, force the short space of that portion that represents the frame, seem to act as a deterrent for that explosive journey of the horizon of the limit to which the painting is tenaciously destined. This constriction of space, this "gagging" the painting so that it does not escape, while casting glimpses of paint from its glares, is like a search for balance; the attempt not to give in to the brush's malice before having not solved the fundamental nodes.

In one work, they are all "Untitled", the strings are neatly arranged horizontally and placed in a box in the center of the painting, like a caesura, a rhythm interruption, a sound scan in the monochrome but not compact surface.

The gestures of years ago, dedicated to the brush, seems to have passed to the ropes that mark the faction of the wire, the physical strength of the pull, the energy to tend what escapes, or that threatens to take over.

In one of the last works of Tabacco the base and the apex of the painting, markedly vertical, are wrapped by the strings, just iridescent of painting, the heart of it is painted. As in a northern aurora landscape, the center is marked by an ice horizon and this line does not define a sub or an above, but rather separates two areas of the same paint-like event. The balance is still based on tensions, not pacified poetically, but the research is precise, aimed at bearing fruit.

*Barbara Tosi*



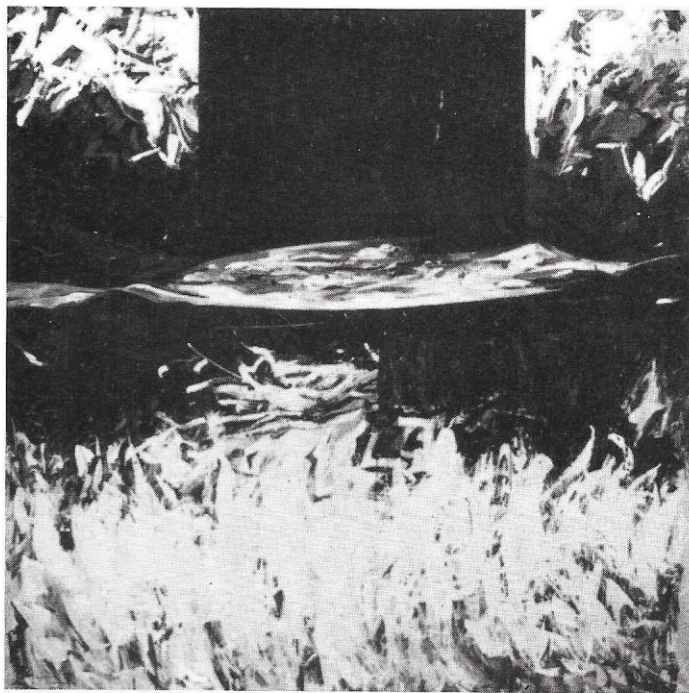
Franco Marrocco was born in Rocca D'Evandro (CE) on 7 December 1956. Among his most important exhibitions: 1978 Cultural Services Center, Cassino. 1981 Municipal Exhibition Hall, Cassino. 1982 Cultural Center Magazine, Prato; Galleria Gonnelli, Florence; E.P.T. Room Frosinone. 1984 Center of Sarro, Rome; Museum of antiquarium, Sezze (LT). 1986 XI Rome Quadrennial, Palazzo dei Congressi, Rome. 1987 Church of S. Domenico, Arpino (FR); Gallery Aleph Spazio d'Arte, Milan; Palazzo Vecchia Pretura, Saronno (VA). 1988 1st Biennial of Sacred Art, Fermo. 1989 Chambre de Commerce Italienne pour la France, Paris. Castello Saraceno, Agropoli (SAI) Lives and Works in Via S. Giuseppe, 70 - 21047 Saronno, Via Airella, 1 - 03044 Cervaro (FR).

Giuseppe Tabacco was born in Rome on 3/11/1956, studied architecture, lives and works in Rome.

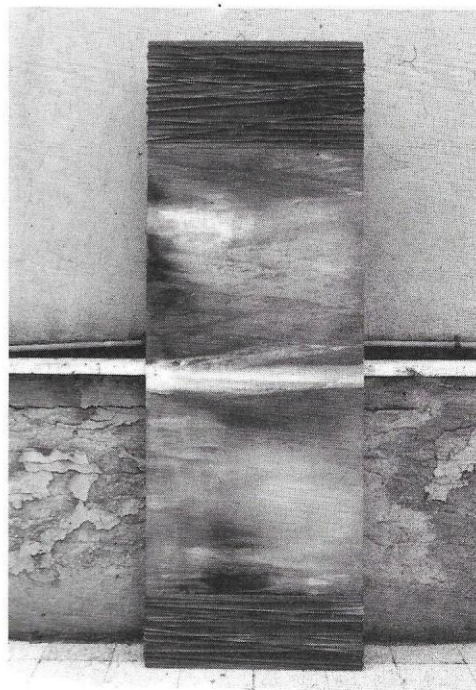
INAUGURATION  
SEPTEMBER 16, 1989 - 6.00 pm

CHURCH OF S. MARIA AD NIVES  
RIMINI - CORSO D'AUGUSTO, 237

HOURS: 16.00 - 19.00



F. Marrocco,  
Aquilone 1987,  
acrilico su tela.



G. Tabacco,  
Senza titolo 1988,  
smalto, canapa e juta su tavola.